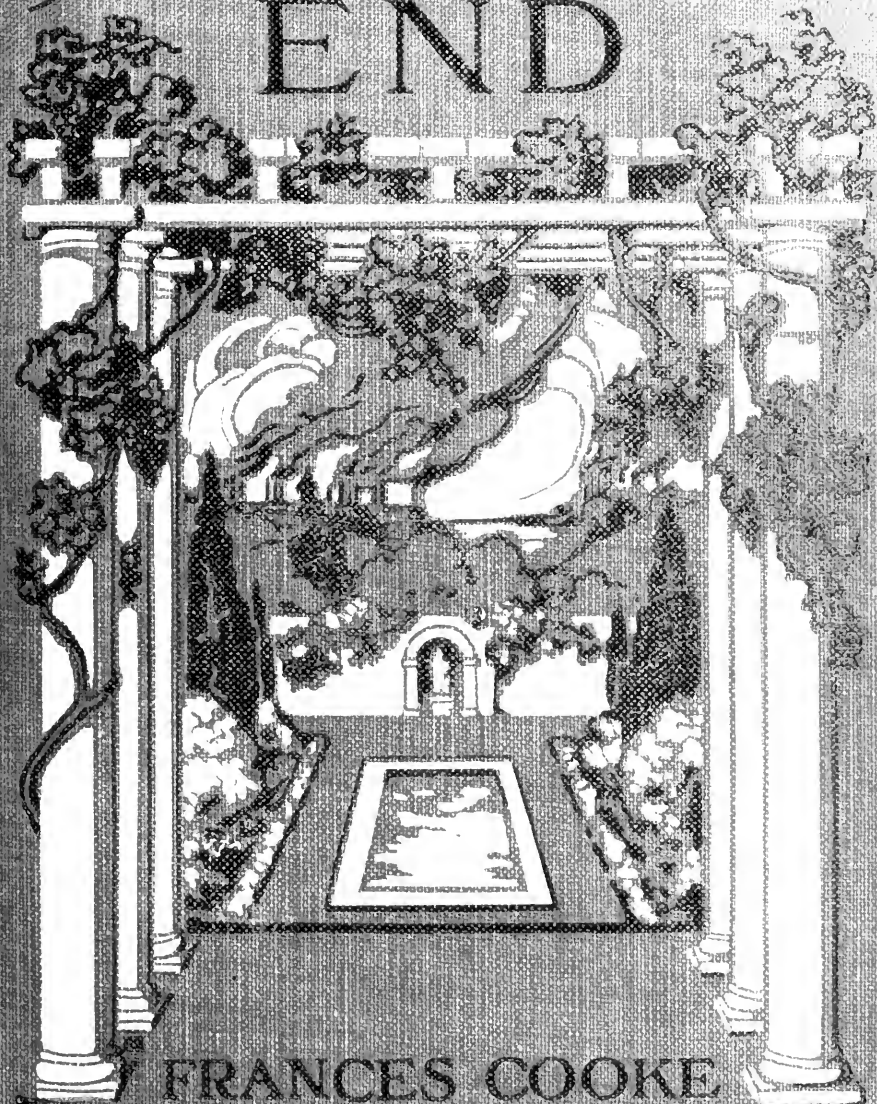


HER JOURNEY'S END





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HER JOURNEY'S END

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HER JOURNEY'S END

BY

FRANCES COOKE

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"The Unbidden Guest," etc.*



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HER JOURNEY'S END

CHAPTER I

PROBLEMS

THE girl stood looking out of the sacristy window, twisting her long gloves idly through her fingers, her glance, meanwhile, fastened on the hurrying men and women who were passing on to the big gray factories at the other end of the town. The shrill whistles which announced that the day of toil had begun sounded in her ears, piercingly, almost menacingly. As she watched, and the last, long-drawn-out note of the siren quivered and died on the crisp air, the street seemed to clear almost magically, for not to be inside those gates when the whistle ceased meant the loss of a day's work—a thing no man or woman among them could afford. The girl, however, did not move as the street grew quiet, but stared out in abstracted fashion, and presently the low, humming sound of countless machines fell on her ears. That sound roused her. She turned away with a low

sigh, just as Father Richards bade adieu to some one at the door and came back into the sacristy—a small, thin priest, with mild blue eyes, and a kind face to which the thick, snow-white hair above his forehead lent dignity and a certain austereness.

“My dear girl,” he began, with a pleasant smile, “I did not mean to keep you waiting. You have that long walk to Lyndhurst before you, and fasting, too! Won’t you let Ann give you a cup of coffee?”

“No, Father,” said the girl. “I do not mind fasting—that is the least one can do.” She smiled then. “I am somewhat at a loss *what* to say, because I do need your advice and don’t know how to ask for it.”

“Come! That’s good!” His kind blue eyes laughed at her.

“Yesterday, on my way home from Mass, Mr. Williamson met me. Now, please don’t look grave yet, Father. You know I’ve been to see his mother frequently this last month—the poor, bedridden soul!—and I’m sure he knows how I feel toward—toward everything. He said that they are going to call on my—on Mrs. Lackland personally—a committee of them, over Mr. Doring’s head. Did you know that?”

"Yes—I advised them to do that, Pauline."

"Well. He seemed to feel that my intervention would help."

"Did he say so?"

"He implied as much."

"And you——"

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"I'm not sure, Father. If it did not help a great deal, it would harm as much. Aunt Laura has such peculiar ideas about the factories—she simply will not be advised or controlled or argued with——"

"I know that," said Father Richards. "I have spoken to her on more than one occasion."

"That is it—you understand," continued the girl. "I feel that she cares for me very much and several times I've mentioned—well, little things. She has listened without comment . . . perhaps even with indulgence. But it hasn't amounted to anything."

"Nor is it likely that it will," said Father Richards slowly. "My advice to you would be to say nothing at all now, Pauline. If she is prepared for Williamson's visit, she may be on guard—and perhaps a trifle prejudiced. You know she feels that you are scarcely a judge—a girl just out of her teens——" He smiled.

"Then I'll run on. I felt just that way—some instinct told me that, but I wanted your word as well. I should not like to think afterward that I could have done anything and would not." She drew her gloves on hastily. "I must be going—Lyndhurst is a good three-quarters of an hour off——"

"You are sure you will not take some coffee——"

"Thank you, I positively do not care for anything, Father. Good morning."

The priest smiled and nodded and then, as she left the room he went over to the high desk, from which he picked up his breviary absently. There was a new line of worry between the kind blue eyes, and he stood staring before him for some minutes. His housekeeper came along the hall and looked in at him inquiringly. She wanted to satisfy herself that no indiscreet caller was robbing Father Richards of a much needed breakfast. Very much needed, indeed, for he had been called out twice since midnight.

* * * * *

The young girl made her way hurriedly through the lower part of the town, and went out past the cluster of cottages that bordered the "Lyndhurst road," as it was called. From here it was a brisk

walk of half an hour to reach Lyndhurst itself. About the same time a young man of about her own age, with his gun slung over his shoulder, and whistling merrily, walked with brisk steps through the narrow path that led from the dense woods of Squaw Island to the shores lapped by the little bay—Squaw Bay they called it, for the want of a better name. There was a slight breeze, which served but to make the morning more agreeable, and he threw back his head several times, inhaling the piney odor, so sharply intensified by the freshness of a perfect October morning.

There was a small skiff fastened to the shore. He threw his game-bag and gun down, and then sprang in himself. To reach the land opposite was but the work of a few moments, and then he vaulted over the low, rough stone wall that skirted a stretch of beautiful park land, dodging in and out between the trees to make a cross-cut toward the substantial gray stone mansion that seemed, in spite of its massive size, to lurk behind the giant maples that closely surrounded it. Here he seated himself on the terrace and lighted a cigar, puffing at it contentedly, while he drew a paper from his pocket and began to read.

The whole appearance of the young man de-

noted a certain refined elegance. He was somewhat boyish of form, his features were open and frank, his eyes a clear dark brown, and his hair was a wavy chestnut. As is the way with some youths of twenty-one, he was rather vain of his personal appearance. Nor could he be blamed for this—up to the present he had had little else to worry over.

“Lucky that a cigar before breakfast does not spoil my appetite,” he mused, half aloud. “And mother will not say that I don’t do the meal justice this morning. It certainly has been good sport——”

The noise of the opening and shutting of the gates at the entrance made him look up with some surprise. Then he saw through the trees a girlish form in a long, light coat, and he rose.

“Out again, Pauline!” he said, as she approached. “Where have you been?”

“To town,” she answered casually. She came up the steps and sat on the stone bench beside him. “To Mass. And then I waited to watch the people—those hundreds and hundreds of people—going to work in the factories. *Your* factories, Bertram.”

Pauline Faulkner was a year younger than Ber-

tram Lackland, but her face was so childishly round, her lips so red and babyish, that she would have appeared less than twenty were it not for the grave expression of her eyes. Those eyes seemed to have mirrored thoughts that are not wont to youth, and a keen reader of character would have asserted that she had seen the hardships of life, if not felt them. At first sight, caught with the reserved, almost repressed, look that was habitual to her, she might not seem even pretty. But the fire of her spirit could kindle those eyes and cheeks to a glow of beauty.

"You were out as early as I," she said, leaning back, for the sense of rest was grateful after her long walk. She pointed to the well-filled game-bag. "Wild duck! And the season opened only yesterday. You have lost no time."

"I could not help it—the morning was so beautiful——"

She laughed.

"Why, you are not trying to excuse yourself to me?"

"For taking the exercise you recommended as necessary? No, indeed!"

"The best exercise in the world for a frivolous, vain youth."

"Frivolous! Vain!" He was a little offended now. He sat looking at her, trying to read her expression. He had unusual respect for Pauline. He fancied that he himself was quite a student of the problems of the day—and he could not understand the slight mockery that crept into her manner when he would discuss any question of the sort with her.

"Oh, I know you have a poor opinion of me, Pauline!"

"I have no opinion at all," she said.

"In the end you shall have," he said with conviction. "Some day I will prove to you that I am able to grasp big things and carry them to execution."

The girl was silent, her eyes fixed on vacancy. What a contrast presented itself to her view—in the streets filled with their hurrying throngs; the shrill sound of the factory whistles in her ear—and this cool, indolent, well-dressed, blasé youth, who spoke of problems, and used the cant of those who would fain help the poor—with words only.

"What are you thinking of?" he asked, seeing that she did not mean to address him again.

"Your mother," she answered. "Of the count-

less tasks that fill out her day, of the huge interests she controls, of what a mighty power she is in the commercial world. I was thinking of her—and of the factories—and of you.”

It was his turn to be silent then.

“How little I know of these things,” he said half-musingly. “I wish I knew more—yes, I wish that, and yet I could never grasp the subject as you would. With your past experience——”

A slight flush rose to her cheeks. She averted her face.

“My past experience is a tabooed subject,” she said, and there was an undercurrent of pain in her tones. “Do not speak of it! I would forget that I have ever lived— Oh! To obliterate from my memory all that lies between my fifth and my twentieth year—from that day when I bade an unconscious farewell to this, my country, to the day when I came back to it . . . a tired child. . . .” Her voice died into silence. He was touched and penitent.

“Forgive me, Pauline. I did not mean to hurt you.”

“I am trying to forget,” she said wearily. “You must help me, for it is not easy, Bertram.”

Her eyes fell on the paper lying at her feet, and

the scorn she could not repress crept into her voice once more as she read its name aloud.

"Anarchical literature, that!" she said. "More work for poor Father Richards!"

"Can you blame me for wanting to learn their creed first-hand?" he said. "Julian Stanhope told me that this paper would prove a great help to me. You have never met Julian Stanhope, Pauline, but when you do I think you will understand the reason why I am inclined to take the socialistic view of matters which——"

"He can only repeat just what I have heard in every shape," she said. "How long have *you* known him, Bertram?"

"Some months only—he is a friend of Mrs. Sigogne's—the chatelaine of The Pines. There will be another study for you, Pauline, even though Marion Sigogne has no interest in social problems. But Stanhope is one of the most engaging of men. You and he will be in perfect accord."

"You talk as if you knew just what my sentiments are——"

"I have grown to understand them. I have corresponded with the editor of that sheet you despise." He pointed toward it. "I can find nothing harmful in his assertions."

"Bertram," said the girl gently, "I pity you. Oh, I know I'm younger than you—a whole year younger. But no editor could convince me—nor no acquaintance of a few months' standing could persuade me—deliberately to inveigh against the traditions of law and order which my fathers left. You're doing that, deliberately. As for the creed of humanity, as they call it—well, if you could go into the factories you'd find it there—and I shall be surprised if it does not show itself in ugly fashion, to your detriment, some day. This Julian Stanhope is a much older man than you, is he not? He ought to be ashamed——"

"My dear girl! If you think Julian Stanhope's ideas would cost him a moment's sacrifice, you are mistaken. He is not studying these things to put them into practice."

"Oh! I see!" She sat quiet a moment or two. Then she sighed. "Poor Father Richards!" she said then. "Poor Father Richards!"

Bertram would have asked her what those words meant. He was looking at her with some admiration in his glance, for the discussion had brought a new light into her eyes and color to her cheeks. She was really lovely, he thought. At that moment, however, a thin, clean-shaven man came

out on the terrace through the open window. He approached the young people with some severity in his manner.

"Breakfast has been announced," he said. "Mrs. Lackland has sent me to look for you."

"Oh, Bertram!" cried the girl, "I must brush myself up a bit, or Aunt Laura will never forgive me. Say I shall be down in a second, Mr. Sands." With a laughing glance at the young man, she disappeared. Mr. Sands looked after her with disapproval, even dislike on his face. Then he went inside again, and Bertram followed him.

CHAPTER II

A STRANGE ENCOUNTER

FEW people outside those who had direct dealings with her knew that the sole owner and the head of the great cotton factories known as The Lackland Manufacturing Company was a woman. She occupied a unique position in the business world, and the immediate and allied branches of the business were practically unlimited. There were offices in all the leading European cities, and the product of the factories was known the country over. Lyndhurst, the old gray stone mansion set well away from the busy town, had been built by Gregory Lackland before his death, so that he might be in close touch with the two big factories he had built in thriving New England, where the crops of his own fields in the South were converted into products famous not alone in the home market, but the markets of the world, typically American in its wide-spreading interests.

The present head of the enterprise was as coolly calculating, as far-seeing, and as rigidly conservative as had been the founder, Gregory Lackland. In his lifetime his wife had worked beside and

with him, and he had profited many times by her advice. He left his affairs entirely in her hands at his death, which had occurred eleven years previous to the opening of this story. His two sons, Gregory, Jr., just entering college and in his seventeenth year, and Bertram, barely ten years old, could not then be considered factors in the management of the industry which was to perpetuate his name. He made no provision for them. His wife had begun his fortune with her own modest one, and had increased it largely since by her quick grasp of affairs. Therefore to her should be left the settlement of their children in life, her husband realizing that what she would do would be well done.

An experienced traveler, it was Mrs. Lackland's habit to pay flying visits from one of her European offices to another, as the fancy took her. She was a good woman, though not in any sense a deeply religious one. She fulfilled the duties of life to the letter, and was exact in complying with the regulations of the Church, but there was a sense of incomprehension about it all, as if nothing had power to affect or touch her—as if the real woman were successfully hidden.

And yet she dearly loved her sons. Gregory,

who had been abroad since the completion of his studies, traveling at first, and then in charge of the London branch, was the hope of a somewhat vaguely planned future. She smiled at Bertram's extravagant notions, his vaunted brotherly equality with all the human race, and gave a good-natured ear to what she deemed his "schoolboy raving." There had been a time in her life when she, too, had studied the problems of life which now seemed to fill the volatile mind of her son. She had studied them and pondered on them and cast them aside unsolved—as Bertram would, she knew.

She had returned from a somewhat protracted stay abroad about six months previous, and on this occasion, the young stranger, whom she introduced to every one as her niece, Pauline Faulkner, accompanied her. The coming of this new member of the household had been unexpected—not even Bertram had known of her existence. She spoke English with an accent that seemed caught from many tongues, due, doubtless, to her peculiar upbringing, and to various foreign teachers; an accent which even the short space of six months had served to eradicate greatly, except when she grew excited. The servants, all old and trusted

members of the family, scarcely knew how to take her. She carried herself like a princess, and yet with a certain grave humility that made classification hard. To Mrs. Lackland she was all sweetness and affection. To Master Bertram, the easy-going, well-beloved young master, she gave scant courtesy, often unconcealed ridicule. She took a deep interest in Mrs. Lackland's affairs, and the older woman allowed her much liberty, so that presently she was known as well in the homes of the factory folk as if she had lived among them all her life. Strangely enough, this had earned her the dislike of several members of the household, Mr. Sands, Mrs. Lackland's secretary, being particularly annoyed.

The factories, which employed so many thousands of souls, seemed to be the girl's especial hobby. Yet, while Mrs. Lackland listened occasionally to her remarks concerning them, she was too self-satisfied, too well-assured, and too confident of her own ability, to do more than listen. It would take a very powerful upheaval of the social conditions surrounding her to persuade Laura Lackland that there was anything wrong with her mode of procedure.

Her appearance, as she sat at the breakfast-table

this morning, substantiated anything that might be said of her ability. She was a slender woman, a little above the medium height, with gray eyes set far apart, eyes neither large nor small, but suggestive of hidden power. The square forehead above them argued mentality, the firm chin and well-closed lips were determined without being masculine. She looked like a very clever, very positive, very proud woman—and no one would say she was very sensitive or very yielding or very merciful. She had been born to rule—and had carried out her destiny.

“Good morning, mother,” said Bertram cheerfully, as he entered the room and, as was his custom, bent and kissed her. Mrs. Lackland surveyed him critically.

“My dear lad! What a way to appear at the breakfast-table! Where in the world have you been?”

“Over at Squaw Island since daybreak this morning, shooting. I will brush up and be with you in a jiffy.”

“Please don’t keep me waiting, Bertram. I have an appointment at ten o’clock. Did you see Miss Pauline, Mr. Sands?”

Mr. Sands, standing at the mantel with his

hands clasped behind his back, turned a severe face toward her.

"Miss Pauline was on the terrace with Mr. Bertram," he said evenly. "She has gone to change her dress, as she has been down to the factories, I believe."

He said this quite casually, although, as Mrs. Lackland's trusted secretary, he had reason to know that, in spite of her seeming approval, these early morning jaunts annoyed his employer very much. There was a moment of silence. Bertram withdrew, not listening, and a slight frown appeared between the lady's finely curved black brows.

"Mr. Doring is very much disturbed over this," said Mr. Sands in a lower tone. "Perhaps it would be as well to ask Miss Pauline to stay——"

"Oh! She is a mere child—a girl of twenty! What harm can it do? She must have some amusement—and if this amuses her!" Mrs. Lackland shrugged her shoulders. "We will soon have other things to occupy her spare time—dances and parties and excursions. This fancy will wear off."

"But Mr. Doring——"

"I can't help Mr. Doring. He will have to put up with it. Ah, Pauline!" as the young girl en-

tered, with Bertram close behind. "I'm afraid I shall have to make the breakfast hour either earlier or later."

She spoke playfully, and the girl's face lighted up.

"Do, please, forgive me, Aunt Laura!" she said penitently. It was wonderful what a charm this softened expression gave to her young face. Her countenance in repose was so haughty as to be repellent. She seemed, usually, to look upon the world with disdain—a world to which she meant little and in which she occupied but a small place. As she bent over the older lady, Mrs. Lackland took her face between her palms and kissed her on the lips. She had always desired a daughter, and none had been given her, so that this girl seemed to creep into a place in her heart that was ready to be filled. Then, yielding to her love of orderliness, she pushed back one or two rebellious curls from the white forehead.

"Careless little girl," she said reprovingly. "Have you been out without a hat? Come, come, let us have breakfast. It is getting too late in the year for these early morning walks, Pauline!"

As kindly as were these words, they seemed to rouse quick resentment in the girl. She threw

back her head with the motion that a young, impatient horse gives when it feels the rein. Mrs. Lackland poured out her coffee calmly and handed it to her, without pretending to see this movement.

"You will waste time and sympathy to no purpose," she continued. "Believe me, my dear child, I speak from experience. People do not appreciate self-sacrifice."

The girl pressed her lips together. Bertram, engrossed in his breakfast, paused an instant.

"They must be educated up to it, mother dear. Are we not the people? Is it not our duty to elevate others to our level?"

"You talk like a book," said his mother testily. "I have spent forty years of my life among 'the people.' I may express myself with less elegance than you, but I think I know them better."

An old servant entered then with letters, which he brought to Mrs. Lackland for distribution. She handed one to Bertram, who broke the seal hurriedly.

"Why, it's from Gregory!" he cried. Pauline received no letters. Mrs. Lackland laid hers down beside her plate and continued the meal. The gray-haired servant paused at her side.

"There is a committee of three men from the

East Shore factory," he said. "They want to see you."

Mrs. Lackland frowned.

"To see me? They must wait. Tell them so."

"Yes, madam."

"When Mr. Sands finishes his breakfast he will attend to them."

"Yes, madam."

Pauline had listened eagerly, with parted lips and flushed cheeks. She bent forward as if to speak when the old servant left, but catching Mr. Sands' gaze fixed intently upon her, she refrained. Mrs. Lackland turned to the secretary.

"More complaints, I suppose," she said grimly. "You have my orders. And—let them wait—don't hurry."

Mr. Sands nodded quietly. He was master of situations like these. Meantime Bertram, reading rapidly, gave vent to exclamations of joy.

"Gregory is coming home, mother! He has left the London office for good. He has already started."

Mrs. Lackland looked grave. To see her dearly loved son again—this would indeed be happiness. But she had meant him to master every detail of

her foreign business affairs—what did this sudden whim on his part indicate?

“Give me the letter,” she said. “I hope he has left a suitable person in charge.”

Mr. Sands leaned leisurely back in his chair, perusing the morning paper. The sight of him angered the impetuous young girl, who knew that anxious men in the hall below awaited his word. She rose and went to the sunny window, where Bertram followed her.

“I am delighted that Gregory is coming,” he said. “You will find in him a foeman worthy of your steel, Miss Pauline Faulkner. At least, you will not dare to say he lacks earnestness.”

“I shall know how to value earnestness,” she said with a sarcastic inflection.

“Gregory is really clever, Pauline. His knowledge is extensive.”

“His knowledge has done the factories and Lyndhurst much good,” she replied.

Mrs. Lackland looked up. The conversation had gone far enough.

“Why do you defend your brother—or praise him?” she asked coldly. “And let me remind you both that Lyndhurst affairs are *my* affairs.”

Mr. Sands rose and left the room quietly.

Bertram said nothing. Pauline's sarcasm, his mother's reproof—both of which he felt he had not deserved, angered him. He thrummed upon the window-pane. Pauline turned her face away. She was not thinking of this big boy in the sulks, but of the poor men waiting downstairs with anxious hearts.

"I am going to my room," he said at last. "I shall write a good long letter to my friend Penniston. At least, although I do not know him, there is one to whom I can open my heart." He spoke fretfully, petulantly. Pauline caught her breath sharply.

"To whom—of whom— Penniston, you said? . . ." Her voice shook in spite of her efforts at self-control. He knew he had startled her: he had meant to do so.

"Penniston, the great leader of humanity—the noble Penniston, who has given his life to the cause of the people, the editor of that paper which you despise so utterly, Miss Faulkner."

"*You write to him?*" her tones quivered.

"Why not?"

Pauline ignored the mockery in his voice.

"If you knew him . . . you would not. You and he have nothing in common."

"He is a republican of the rankest sort. But that is his attraction to a man like me."

"He is in danger of imprisonment—at any hour, at any moment. It would not be well for a letter of yours to be found in his possession. This morning when you spoke—I did not know it was Penniston."

"Pauline! Were not you one of his followers?"

She crimsoned to the roots of her hair.

"That is twice to-day you have reminded me of the past!" she said passionately. "Of which you know nothing, nothing! I wish I had never set foot across your threshold."

Mrs. Lackland had listened without interruption. She had had no idea that the conversation would end in this way.

"My child! Pauline! How can you talk so? Do I not love you as if you were my own?"

The girl turned on her stormily.

"But the poor waif is not grateful enough! That is it! He speaks of Penniston . . . and you listen . . . as if, as if . . ." she choked then. "Well, I shall go, I shall go quickly!" Quivering from head to foot, she left the room.

Bertram stood dumbfounded. His mother glanced at his dismayed face.

"A difficult task," she said. "A difficult task to tame a character like that! But we must be very gentle with her—she has had a sad life of it, poor thing, a sad, sad life. You must help me to make her happy and contented, Bertram. As for Penniston," she frowned. "I do not want his name mentioned again. You are a foolish, thoughtless boy. Do you not know that he is Pauline's worst enemy?"

"Pauline's worst enemy!" The young man echoed the words. "You have told me that she left London to avoid him——"

"Then I did not tell you enough," she said. "How is it that *you* correspond with him?"

"Why—Stanhope recommended this paper," he pulled it out of his pocket. "I liked the sentiments of one of the articles and wrote to the editor, Penniston answered. He is brilliant—witty."

"So are all his kind," said Mrs. Lackland severely. "You will discontinue the paper at once, Bertram. More is involved in this than you imagine—Pauline's whole future peace of mind, for one thing. And you will not write to him again. Promise me, my boy."

"Why, yes," he said slowly. "You told me

Pauline's story, but you didn't tell me sufficient. Half-confidences are worse than none."

"Sometimes," she said briefly, tartly. "I did not feel that Pauline's story was your affair. At least, let this matter be ended here."

Feeling a little humiliated, the young man left the room.

CHAPTER III

LYNDHURST AFFAIRS

MRS. LACKLAND proceeded to open her letters while the servant cleared the breakfast-table. Presently Mr. Sands entered, a little flushed and plainly upset.

"They will not talk to me, Mrs. Lackland. They insist on seeing you."

"Who are they?"

"Williamson, of the coloring floor, and three others—I don't know their names, but Williamson is the leader. He said they will wait all day and come again to-morrow, and every day this week, until they can see you personally."

"Such nonsense, such nonsense!" she said irritably. "I will not see them. Tell them so positively. They know my rule about complaints."

Mr. Sands withdrew. Five minutes later he was back.

"Shall I call up some of the servants to throw them out?" he began abruptly. "They are in the office, from which they refuse to stir, and you have an appointment with Martin's man in fifteen minutes."

Mrs. Lackland rose to her feet.

"Here are the letters," she said hastily. "I'll talk them over with you later. Give orders that if any caller comes before I am rid of these men he must wait in the library. But hurry—I want a record of this interview."

A minute later she swept into her office with a severe face, a forbidding manner. There were four men waiting, who rose as one at her entrance. Williamson, a young fellow of about twenty-eight, stepped forward.

"You are Mr. Williamson?"

"Yes, madam. We are from the East Shore. We——"

"You have a complaint to make? Have you seen Mr. Doring?"

"No, madam."

"Well. Have you your complaint in writing?"

"No—we find that it does no good to complain in writing. The complaints are shelved before they reach you."

Mrs. Lackland flushed.

"That is a bold thing to say, Mr. Williamson. Mr. Doring has my full confidence. He produces results. I don't inquire into his methods."

"So we understand, madam. Our department

is not the only one that has had to suffer from them. No one can live under Mr. Doring's methods. Unjust fines, petty fault-finding, unequaled adjustment of the work—I wish you would let us explain these matters in detail——”

“I am very busy—extremely busy,” she said coldly. “Put your complaints in writing and I promise to give them my personal attention. Let that suffice for the present.”

Williamson stood his ground doggedly.

“You have some good workmen in your employ, Mrs. Lackland, and it is not easy to get good workmen nowadays——”

“I can always get them,” she interrupted. “Do not let my affairs annoy you. If you choose, send in your complaints. If not——” she shrugged her shoulders. “Good morning, gentlemen.”

The men exchanged glances—hopeless glances; then they turned toward the door, and filed out silently. As they went down the stairs Pauline Faulkner met them on the lower landing. She gave her hand impulsively to Williamson.

“I was afraid so,” she said. “I can see by your faces that there have been no results. Do not give up hope. I hear that the elder son is coming home—Mr. Gregory. He will surely take an interest in

the affairs of the firm . . . Good by. Better luck shortly."

Mr. Sands, coming down the stairs, heard the parting salutation. He gave the young girl a searching look as she passed him—a look she did not see. Her face was pale, her eyes fixed on vacancy.

No caller more opposite to the ones whom Mrs. Lackland had just dismissed could be imagined than the one she greeted now smilingly. Although well into the forties, he was splendidly preserved and dressed with elegance. He did not seem in any sense of the word a business man—rather one given over much to the follies of society.

"Ah, madam!" he murmured, with a pronounced foreign accent. "It is a year since I have seen you—and your charm has increased a hundredfold."

"Monsieur Bodieff flatters," said Mrs. Lackland quietly. "A year is much at my time of life. How prosper affairs in your country?"

"They go well, madam. We have a new amalgamation to propose, on terms slightly different, but still, we hope, entirely satisfactory. If not, I am authorized to make them so—for madam's sake!"

"We shall see," said Mrs. Lackland quietly. "I know Monsieur Bodieff by reputation, and his firm as well. I feel safe in their hands."

"A thousand thanks, madam!"

"It is a while since I have seen your Mr. Martin. Mr. Gerald Martin is now senior member! Well. That is it. We old people step aside to make way for the younger folks. That is the law."

"The law. True. It is rumored," he pursued, "that some time since Madam Lackland has made a new and charming addition to her family circle—a young lady."

"My niece, yes, who has been educated abroad," said Mrs. Lackland serenely. "I did not know my domestic affairs were so well known, Monsieur Bodieff."

"It is said she is the daughter of one Faulkner—madam's connection with his family would hurt her—yes? With us?"

"That will do," said Mrs. Lackland hastily. "Say no more, please. My niece is with me, to stay with me. She will probably remain in America and settle here. At least that is my hope and my purpose."

"Madam has but to wish to achieve," was the gallant response. "It is well. She is out of mis-

chief here. Now, if madam will give me her attention for a little while . . .”

They talked on animatedly. Lunch was served in the office, and it was two o'clock before Monsieur Bodieff had concluded his business arrangements. As he made his final adieus Madam Lackland detained him.

“On your side of the water affairs are more complicated than they are here,” she said quietly. “Lyndhurst is very far removed from London—tell your agents that. Also that a good American citizen has undertaken the task of making a good American citizen out of Pauline Faulkner. She is young, Bodieff—you know how young. Speak of her as if she were your daughter.”

“I will, madam, I will. It was but a precautionary remark on my part. There is so much that could arise from her presence here——”

“Nothing to hurt any one, Bodieff—rest assured of that.”

“I do. I know, madam. Farewell.” He lifted her hand to his lips. Hardly had the door closed upon him, Mr. Sands escorting him, than Pauline appeared from the room opposite.

“Aunt, my dear Aunt Laura!” she said, throwing herself into the older lady’s arms. “Forgive

me, forgive me! I am mean, ungrateful, undeserving!"

Her whole body trembled—there was as much storm and passion about her repentance as there had been in her rebellious outburst earlier in the morning.

"I have forgiven you, my child," said Mrs. Lackland, stroking the golden hair softly. "I know that we can not judge you by our conventional standards—at least not yet, Pauline."

"Oh, I can't stay here!" said the girl. "Who knows what misfortune I may bring upon you?"

"You will bring no misfortune upon me," said Mrs. Lackland steadily, "neither on me nor mine. So do not fear that. But one thing I must ask—one promise you must give me."

"Yes, aunt?"

"You must not send letter nor message to that person of whom Bertram spoke—nor receive any from him."

"Yes, aunt."

"Nor from any of his friends or agents—have I your promise, Pauline?"

Standing before her aunt quietly, the girl became suddenly thoughtful. Then she raised her

eyes to meet with frankness the grave glance bent upon her.

"But Bertram. He said——"

"Bertram says more than he means at times. Do not think about Bertram now. He shall not communicate with him."

"Then you have my promise, Aunt Laura, gladly given."

"Thank you, my dear. I have had enough of business for one day—I am tired of it. Come with me on the terrace—I want to tell you what I have planned for you this winter. We are going to the city and you can satisfy your love for the opera to your heart's content. And I am having our house in town entirely renovated, so that we can entertain as lavishly as you wish."

"Aunt Laura! You simply make me feel——"

"Pauline, you have had an unhappy life—a very unhappy life. You are too young to know the hardships of an older age, therefore you must put the past behind you. Far behind you, my Pauline."

"I can't," she said, between her teeth. They paused an instant while Mrs. Lackland wound a light shawl about her and threw another over the girl's shoulders.

"You will in time, my dear child," said the older woman serenely. "You are only twenty. Twenty! You should be in short dresses yet, instead of bothering your pretty head——"

"Aunt Laura," said the girl hurriedly, "the other life is in my blood. I do not seek problems, they come to seek me. If you would listen now—— if you would only let me tell you about the men who were here to-day——"

"Pauline, my child, I have had enough of business."

"But, Aunt Laura——just let me show you——"

"I will not listen. I am going to hear what they have to say, yes—but not from you. Forgive me if this seems harsh. It is my rule—even for you I will not break it. Besides, I entirely disapprove of your meddling in factory affairs. You know why I am tolerant of it——merely tolerant. No one else does. But I assure you that if you were to talk until doomsday you could say nothing that would persuade me. No man is so deaf as the man who will not hear, my Pauline, and the sooner you are persuaded that I will not listen, the happier you will make me."

CHAPTER IV

RETROSPECTION

BERTRAM drove to the station for Mr. Masterson, his mother's chief adviser, who was to dine with them that evening in order to attend to some legal business the following day. At Mrs. Lackland's request he had brought his nephew with him, quite a young man, but of good appearance, and not at all averse to paying homage to a charming and lovely girl. Perhaps this had been in Mrs. Lackland's mind when she extended the invitation. At any rate, she made him take Pauline in to dinner, which was always an enjoyable affair at Lyndhurst. During the course of the meal the young man devoted himself exclusively to the girl, and in spite of the depression which weighed upon her after the conversation with her aunt that afternoon, she could not but be amused and entertained. It was pleasant to see her face light up. She laughed and chattered in a way that Bertram found delightful, because totally unexpected. Mr. Masterson looked on with a serene countenance. He was a kind old man, upright and just.

"She is charming, charming," he said to Mrs.

Lackland. "You have done well to bring her here."

They were taking coffee in the drawing-room, and Pauline's laugh reached their ears—a low, sweet laugh, evoked by some absurdity of young Leonard Masterson's.

"I have found her so," said Mrs. Lackland, nodding. "Much less foreign than her early education prepared me for. One trace of the old evil will not be eradicated, however, and I am anxious to remove her to scenes more fitting to her youth and gayety. She has lived the life of the old too long. Other people's affairs annoy her, poor child. Even mine!" with a smile that brought an amused light into Mr. Masterson's eyes. "Mine most of all, for she has no other things here to bother her—actually pleading the cause of the men . . . It is absurd—a child like that!"

"You interest me," said Mr. Masterson. "Does she go about much in the factories?"

"Occasionally. I have forbidden it lately to a great extent, but of course not altogether. That would not be policy."

"Better policy, dear madam, than partial permission. It can do no good."

"She must realize that herself. I think she does

now. Besides we shall be leaving so very soon it can't really matter."

She paused to glance at the servant coming toward her with a card.

"Oh! Mr. Stanhope! Show Mr. Stanhope in. Pauline, my dear——"

The young girl rose instantly and moved to her aunt's side. Judge Masterson twisted his underlip curiously.

"Stanhope, the impeccable! Why not give me a few moments' grace, dear lady, that I may make good my escape? Or is it really necessary that I become a martyr——"

Mrs. Lackland greeted the tall man who entered now with frank courtesy. He was acquainted with Bertram and Judge Masterson, but the younger Mr. Masterson was a stranger to him. Pauline Faulkner, standing beside her aunt, a slim, straight, girlish figure, encountered the full glance of a pair of peculiar blue eyes before she bent her golden head, acknowledging the introduction. An odd sensation swept over her—one of fear, perhaps, though she could not imagine why she should be afraid. Afterward she looked at the man more observingly. His whole personality was engaging. His features irregular, but strongly cut, his hair,

eyebrows, and short vandyke beard, a very dark brown. A man used to the best of life, thought Pauline—an aristocrat—he looked the part.

She knew nothing of Julian Stanhope's standing in society or history, yet she felt that if she knew more she would be more antagonized. To her, at least, he would not improve on acquaintance. So she dismissed him from her thoughts, and turned again to the light badinage with which Leonard Masterson and Bertram Lackland beguiled the time. Judge Masterson leaned back in his comfortable chair, with such an expression of resignation on his face that Pauline, glancing at him casually, felt the corners of her mouth twitch. She was quick at reading faces and signs.

But try as she might to concentrate her attention on others gradually all were reduced to silence. Mr. Stanhope had come with a message from Mrs. Sigogne, one of Mrs. Lackland's friends. She had asked him to inform Mrs. Lackland that she had just returned from the Springs—that she intended to call in the morning, and would be much pleased if she would be at home to receive her. She would have written this, but her return was unexpected, and she knew well what a busy woman her friend was. For some reason or other

this message seemed to give Mrs. Lackland pleasure.

"I would surely have been out," she said. "I am indebted to you, Mr. Stanhope."

"Oh, no," he answered. He turned his head slightly, so that his glance might fall occasionally on Pauline. "Your niece will get on splendidly with little Miss Helen. She is quite a young lady now. Mrs. Sigogne says you will be astonished what a difference two years have made in her. I am no judge, as my acquaintance is of more recent date. After all, there is nothing to equal the finishing touches of the good nuns. She was such a boisterous little tomboy, her mother asserts."

"A gay, happy little tomboy, Mr. Stanhope."

"I am sure she is that yet—with a difference."

"And your own work—how has it prospered?"

"I am beginning to learn a little about it," he said modestly. "The study of social conditions, from being merely elective, has become my life-hobby. Perhaps in the end I shall do something worth while."

Mrs. Lackland changed the subject abruptly—she did not want Pauline to hear any more. The conversation took a lighter vein, and included the three younger people about the small table. But

Pauline was silent. Julian Stanhope was witty, sarcastic, humorous in turn, and although he did not speak to her directly she felt that he was really talking at her. She resented this, as she unconsciously resented his presence.

When a man like Julian Stanhope has an object in view he generally obtains it. The engaging of a charming young woman in conversation was surely one of the minor details which a fairly determined man could accomplish. By degrees, Leonard Masterson was drawn away and then Bertram. Presently—she could not have told how—Pauline Faulkner was talking to Julian Stanhope alone.

“Have you ever been in London, Miss Faulkner?” he asked idly.

“Yes, I have been in London. I traveled through all the larger European cities.”

“Ah! Do you know your face is strangely familiar. I have seen you somewhere, I am positive. It must have been in London—as that city is freshest in my memory.”

“I hardly think so,” she answered coldly. “I went nowhere of any consequence while there.”

“Nevertheless——”

“I beg your pardon.” She looked at him with a calm face. “I do not care for London—we will

not discuss it. My aunt wishes to make a good American citizen of me. She will succeed, I am sure, especially since America is my birthplace. London will see very little of me in the future."

"Perhaps it is just as well," he answered quietly.

She did not reply to this. Her large eyes met his in a glance of anger and disdain. They said as plainly as if she had spoken, "You are impertinent!" He shrugged his shoulders slightly. Then Judge Masterson, happily, came toward them, and all further conversation between the two was at an end.

* * * * *

The young girl wooed sleep in vain that night. The beads of the rosary slipped idly through her fingers, for she could not concentrate her attention upon her prayers. That man! Who was he? Where had he come from? What had he meant by his strange remarks? A feeling of terror, of fear, possessed her. How much did he know of the past she would fain blot from her memory?

She rose and sat at the window. It was a brilliant night outdoors—the sparkling rays of the moon illumined the avenue of trees, the bushes, the quiet lawns. Nature seemed asleep, wrapped in a peace which man, the restless, could never know.

"Life!" whispered the girl, dropping her fair head in her hands. "What a riddle, what a mystery! 'Tis well we know that God holds the key to it."

All the tragic events of her own short existence rose before her. So few her years, and yet how much of misery they had held! Never a settled home, never the quiet content of life within four walls, but the rush of the hunted, hither, thither, everywhere—Berlin, Moscow, London, Vienna, Paris, and always back to London. Then her mother's death, the empty desolateness of life without her, the father's complete indifference—his unceasing annoyance over the presence of his two children, daughters! They were facts, obstacles, of which he must dispose! He thought of sending them to the nuns to be educated and brought up in their mother's Faith, once his, long since forgotten. But his friends—what would his friends say to that? Those friends of his who despised all forms of government and laughed at all restraint?

So they went to a godless college under foreign, godless teachers, these two girls, the elder, Muriel, and the younger, Pauline. They attended lectures at which Penniston spoke—Penniston, the most godless of them all, and yet one whose words

were honeyed, whose arguments were unanswerable, whose magnetism won all hearts. He lent Pauline books, he spent hours discussing questions with her, and the pulses of youth beat high within her to do good to her fellow-man. In the new laws which he would promulgate she saw the comfort and blessing of all humanity. "The future, the future that is ours!" cried her teacher. "We shall accomplish the freedom of the generations."

Sympathy for the suffering was natural to Pauline. Her whole soul thirsted for sacrifice. She prayed the sweet prayers her mother had taught her, but she did not practise her faith.

"Nothing grows in the garden of humanity that is not watered by tears," said Penniston, his eyes aflame. "Nothing can be accomplished without sacrifice, sacrifice, sacrifice! Yours, mine, every one's!"

"Mine!" she answered. "What is my sacrifice?"

"It will come," he told her.

Muriel's came first. A marriage was arranged between her and a wealthy man, a banker of influence, much older than she. The girl was not consulted. Her father and Penniston managed it all. In vain she pleaded, and Pauline pleaded for her; in vain she asserted her love for another, her dis-

like of Cyril Morton, the man they had selected. She was but an atom in the world, and she must accomplish her destiny, she must help the cause. It was not for her to say what her likes or dislikes might be—it was necessary that the marriage take place. And Muriel obeyed—she dared not disobey.

And when the white-faced victim had departed with the man for whom she had neither respect nor affection, Pauline went to Penniston tempestuously.

“My father and you tell me there is work for me to do,” she said. “I want my work. I am no longer a child.”

“We shall soon make our plans known to you.”

“You shall never sacrifice me as you did Muriel,” she said. “Never—neither my father—nor you—nor the cause!”

He did not appear to listen. Instead his eyes sought the window dreamily.

“Unrighteousness, oppression, iniquity, misery! These are the things we fight to-day, Pauline. Is it right to let one human life stand in the path of our noble purpose? To let one human being’s happiness interfere with the good of all?”

And again he plunged into his plans for the future, and she felt her heart thrilling once more

as she listened. How grand, how glorious, it would be—and how fortunate that she might have a part in it! A few days later he told her how the apostles of the new order were abroad, in field, factory, and workroom, spreading the gospel of freedom. Pauline was roused to enthusiasm—but no work was given her.

“Your hands are too little,” he would say, indulgently. The vulgarity, the rudeness, the brutality of her brothers and sisters in the new order shocked the refined girl. Quarrels ensued which were painful. Penniston was disgusted and infuriated.

“Miserable creatures!” he cried. “They are but cattle fit for slaughter!”

✓ Pauline sat dumb under these words. “Miserable creatures! Cattle for slaughter!” Where was the high resolve, the noble self-sacrifice, prepared to endanger all that common humanity might rise above its common self? In a fever of unrest Pauline left him and went away to fight the doubts assailing her. One resource was opened to her—one friend who had not failed—the priest who had attended her mother in her last illness. Secretly and at night Pauline went to him, and laid her story before him. He was shocked, horrified. The

girl's youth, her attractiveness, the very mentality which showed itself with such prominence, proved to this experienced man of the world what dangers lay before her. She stood on the brink of a precipice—the slightest wavering would mean her destruction.

“Go to your father,” he said, “and ask him to send you away. You must leave the city.”

She went obediently. But her father had disappeared—his flight had been hasty, unexpected. There was no word of farewell. She was trying to grasp this new phase of the situation when Penniston came in.

“Your father has gone, Pauline,” he said.

His white face, stern with passion, his flashing eyes, his stern-set brows, betrayed his anger. She looked at him helplessly.

“Where?” she asked.

“Wherever his blood-money will carry him. He has betrayed his friends.”

Shame filled her—shame unspeakable.

“My father!” she whispered.

“Yes, your father. Pauline, his future fate is in your hands—one word, and I put those upon his track who will never give up the chase until he is disposed of.”

. . . .

"Oh, let me go, too," she said. "I am tired of it all—life here is unbearable. I will go away—far away—anywhere, so that I may never meet one who knew me in this life."

He clasped her hands in his.

"You have gone too far to draw back," he said. "Pauline, are you blind? Why have I kept all disagreeable things from you? Why have I kept you out of danger? Why, for your sake, will I try to shield the man who has betrayed me?"

Had a thunderbolt fallen at her feet she could not have been more astonished. She looked at him, stunned.

"You will marry me, Pauline. As the wife of Penniston no one can hurt or harm you. As Faulkner's daughter you are in danger always."

She tore her hands away and left him.

And now, in quiet Lyndhurst, far removed from those turbulent scenes and sounds, she sat reviewing her life from that day on—all that had preceded, and all that followed it.

She had very little money—she must seek employment, but where? And then, as it chanced, she received a note from Mrs. Lackland. Her father had not entirely forgotten her. Mrs. Lackland was no relative, though she gave her the title

of one. The relationship was very distant. With a warmth of heart unusual in her, Laura Lackland took the poor girl under her protection, and like a wounded bird the girl clung to her. They left London immediately. Arrived at Lyndhurst, Pauline spent weeks in a state of mind that bordered so close on melancholia that Mrs. Lackland was at her wits' end to arouse her. Bertram gave himself up to the task. She had but to express a wish to have it gratified, and a warm affection grew between the two.

"Our paths in life must diverge, Bertram," she said to him once with a sorrowful smile. "Give me your friendship, if you will, for a little while—but I am not of those who can ever know a quiet happiness."

And now what shadow of the past had thrown itself across her future? Why should she fear or dread the unknown? Why should Julian Stanhope's steely-blue eyes seem to threaten untold dangers?

CHAPTER V

A MESSAGE UNDELIVERED

EARLY next morning, right after breakfast, Bertram rode over to The Pines, with a message from his mother for Mrs. Sigogne. Mrs. Lackland would be at liberty all afternoon, and would be delighted to see her then. Mrs. Sigogne was a young widow—ten years older than her step-daughter, Helen, who was just entering her seventeenth year. Paul Sigogne had died two years previous, leaving his wife the sole guardian of the child of his first marriage, and dividing his large property equally between them. Mrs. Lackland had often been consulted by Paul Sigogne in the management of his business affairs, and his widow continued to do the same. It was at Mrs. Lackland's suggestion that Helen Sigogne, a long-limbed, awkward girl of fifteen, had been sent to the convent really to be taught restraint, for she was wilful and undisciplined.

The Pines was a splendid old mansion which once belonged to a very wealthy family, who were compelled, through reverses, to dispose of the stately pile. Paul Sigogne bought it for a princely

sum indeed, but it was worth it, for it was one of the showplaces of the country. A stately lawn stretched from its massive terrace to the artificial lake in the center of the grounds, and beautiful flower-beds could be seen through the long driveway that led up to the house—a driveway lined on either side by the tall old pines that gave the house its name.

Bertram admired the house and its surroundings greatly. He was particularly impressed now by the profusion of gay blossoms that nodded a welcome from every conceivable corner—so gay and brilliant that they mocked the changing foliage of the trees. Autumn's gold and bronze and yellow seemed out of place here, where summer reigned. Some such thought as this came to Bertram as he rode, paying little attention to the direction of his horse. He was a sure rider. But suddenly the sound of sparkling laughter fell upon his ears, and at the same time a huge Great Dane appeared from behind the nearest thicket, and set up a barking that disturbed his sensitive animal. Soliman plunged recklessly, and Bertram was put to it for the moment to keep his seat.

"Come, come, Carlos! Lie down instantly, sir!" cried a girlish voice, and the next instant a young

girl darted forward and put a restraining hand on the dog's collar. He turned his attention to her, and leaped joyfully upon her, almost throwing her down. She struck him aside laughingly. Bertram had time to notice the beauty of one who appeared to be a lovely child, with a figure as straight and slim as the pines about them. Here was the grace of spring, the blossom in the bud, unfolding petal by petal. Nothing angular, as is beauty in its first years; all was grace and life. Her countenance radiated the happiness of her charming nature, it was her right to banish all gloom, as the rising sun dissipates the lingering darkness of the night.

"You come to see my mother?" she began, when the dog had calmed down a trifle. She looked at him with such a frank gaze that he felt embarrassed.

"Is Mrs. Sigogne at home?" he inquired in a very cold voice because of his embarrassment. "You are her daughter—I mean her step-daughter?"

"I am she," said the young girl, with such a roguish, teasing smile that it sent the blood to Bertram's bovisb forehead. "Let me show you into the house. I have heard so much about the people

at Lyndhurst lately," she added, in order to convey to him the knowledge that she knew who he was.

"My mother is particularly anxious to have Mrs. Sigogne to herself for a long while," he said, with a smile. "That is the chief reason why I came over."

"Oh, she will be glad to see you—and I also," she added, with the innocent mischievousness that seemed part of her nature. "You are Bertram Lackland?"

"Why, yes—and you are Helen Sigogne. We are not really strangers to each other, Miss Sigogne. Do you intend to stay at The Pines for the winter?"

"I have no idea," said the young girl, shrugging her shoulders. "I do not mind, as I am not yet 'out,' so I won't care much for the city this year. Papa put no restrictions on me at all—I did just as I pleased. But mother and the Sisters have taught me differently, and I shall try to be very good. Sometimes it is hard, but I am getting used to it."

Bertram Lackland was so young himself that this naïve confession did not seem as humorous as it would have sounded to an older man. He only

knew that this childish young person was delightful, and that she had a very beautiful face. As they approached the steps a servant in livery appeared in the doorway.

"Attend to the horse, Dan," said the girl. "I will take Mr. Lackland to my mother—where is Mrs. Sigogne?"

"In the library, I think, miss," said the man. Bertram followed Helen into the lofty room, where Mrs. Sigogne was seated at the table, a volume lying open before her. There was a puzzled frown on her fair face, and Bertram saw that the book was filled with figures. The woman herself was striking. Every movement betrayed a careless, unconscious grace. Her loveliness and her whole girlish bearing belied even her twenty-seven years. Life had gone easily with Marion Sigogne. Her deep-blue eyes were like wells of light, serene, unclouded. She motioned Bertram to a chair, and then Helen perched on the arm of hers. Bertram delivered his message.

"That is good," she said. "You will stay to luncheon, and then we can go over together. Do you care to come, Helen?"

"Of course I do," answered the girl.

Marion Sigogne, cultured and highly bred, had

the art of putting every one at his ease. Soon the three were engaged in animated conversation, during which Bertram spoke of Gregory's return, and the pleasure it had given them all at Lyndhurst.

"It is good news here, too," said Mrs. Sigogne. "I have known Gregory many years." Her cheeks flushed slightly, and her eyes were suddenly dazzling. She gave Bertram a quick glance, but his face was unconscious. She seemed to breathe more freely.

Later, the two ladies drove to Lyndhurst, and Bertram rode beside the carriage. The day was delightful. The young fellow had never been so happy, although he could not analyze his happiness. Youth was in his veins, his conscience was at rest, and the prettiest girl he had ever met in his life talked to him engagingly. At Lyndhurst, Mrs. Lackland came out on the terrace to greet them, and carried Mrs. Sigogne off with her. Pauline had hidden herself from chance encounter. That she must meet her aunt's friends, she knew, but every fresh acquaintance filled her with dread. The plans which her aunt had made for a gay winter tortured her, but she repressed her feelings. She had no right to protest—she must permit this kind heart to do as it willed with her,

though at times her sense of dependence galled her. Willingly would she have entered one of the huge factories that held so many human beings toiling for their daily bread, and deemed herself happy to work the long day among them. But this was not to be—at least not yet—and she shrank from entering a world that somewhere might bring her face to face with the man she feared and dreaded with all her heart.

So now, in spite of herself, she trembled when at last she was summoned to the drawing-room. She was clad, as usual, in white and she stood looking at her pale face in the glass a moment before going down. She felt very old and tired—and she was but twenty! Her lips curved a little. And it was so Marion Sigogne saw her first—the girl of whom she had heard so much—the pale, golden-haired girl, whose only claim to beauty seemed to be in the striking contrast between her pallor and the darkness of her great gray eyes. That line of disdain still lingered about her lips.

“Why, she is not even pretty,” thought the beautiful woman. Then Pauline looked at her. “She just misses being a paragon,” she amended.

“Your aunt has been speaking of you,” she said,

holding out her hand. "Will you be friends with me, Pauline?"

The girl took her hand gently.

"If you care to have me for a friend when you know me better," she said. The words were not humble—Pauline did not mean them so.

"We have great doings planned for this happy winter . . . I would go to Madam B—— for the new gowns," she added, turning to Mrs. Lackland. "She is so artistic. She will make Pauline a joy forever."

The girl looked inquiringly at her aunt.

"Oh, clothes! One can't go about without clothes," said that lady good-humoredly, in answer to Pauline's questioning glance. "And I shall be so busy this year that Mrs. Sigogne has promised to take much of the entertaining off my hands, so that I will only have to enjoy it—and to see you enjoy it, too, dear," she added affectionately.

For the next week new channels of pleasure seemed to open before the girl. She was won, in spite of herself, by Helen's gayety, her delightful childishness. Under the soft influence of this happy, radiant creature, Pauline expanded into new life. Bertram, too, was more satisfactory, his

odd socialistic notions forgotten. They were young and healthy, and the autumn mornings were made for the long canters on horseback, the delightful little trips to near-by points. The shadows seemed to leave Pauline's eyes, the lips lost their weary curves. She was young and happy and gay herself, as she had never been in all her life.

That week she kept away from the factories. She could do no good—and she thought that when Gregory Lackland returned the men might be able to reach him. She had not forgotten Mrs. Lackland's grave displeasure at her intervention. She would wait. And the days sped by—happy, cheerful days for her.

They had been on an impromptu picnic to Squaw Island, the three, the last day of that peaceful week, and Bertram and Helen had wandered off, leaving her seated alone beside the shore. Lost in her own thoughts she did not hear any one approaching, until a familiar voice fell on her ear.

"Miss Faulkner! This is indeed a pleasure! I had no idea I should find you so easily."

She jumped to her feet hastily. Julian Stanhope was standing beside her.

"Oh!" she said, looking about. "Helen and

Bertram were here but a moment ago . . . They must be about. I shall go look for them."

He smiled.

"You will not have far to look—they are just at the bend there, gathering shells. What do you think of Miss Helen?"

"She is a beautiful, happy-hearted child," she answered. "I have never met any one so unspoiled—and with her advantages she could be insufferable."

"Yes, indeed—and Mrs. Sigogne? I called at The Pines last evening. She speaks of you in extravagant terms."

The girl said nothing.

"You are kindred spirits, I take it," he pursued. "Far above the ordinary run of women." He looked at her keenly an instant. Her eyes were averted, and the little line of hauteur lurked about her lips. It but made her more attractive to this cold and cynical man. "My dear child," he went on, with a sudden change of tone, "you will pardon me if I seem abrupt now? I may not have the chance to talk to you alone again. And I was given a message to put into your hands if ever I came across you. Have I your consent to deliver it?"

A trembling seized her limbs. For a moment earth and sky seemed to swim madly before her eyes. Then by a superhuman exertion of her will she braced herself calmly. Her face was pale. She pointed carelessly toward the sky.

"I think we shall have rain," she said, "and that in a very short while. Will you please call Bertram and Helen? We may be able to reach the house before it comes."

He hesitated. There was a look of admiration on his face. He opened his lips to speak, but she swung around upon him suddenly and stared full into his eyes. Indignation was there, and disdain and fearlessness. There was no shrinking now. She was no coward when danger must be braved. One instant he met the straight glance; one instant he met her gaze unfalteringly. Then he turned on his heel and walked away.

CHAPTER VI

GREGORY LACKLAND AT HOME

GREGORY LACKLAND had been home a week, and the week had been taken up in conversation with his mother, in long walks, in some shooting, and a good deal of letter-writing in his own room. Once or twice the mother spoke, hurriedly, of factory affairs, but it was plain to him how disagreeable was the subject. She had been head and front in every enterprise for the past ten years, and for ten years preceding his father's death she had been chief adviser. To give up what had become second nature to her, would, he felt, only injure her. Nevertheless, he had claims to urge. He seemed inclined to believe that she left too much authority in the hands of paid assistants.

"It is ridiculous," he said, with a good-humored smile, "that my mother will see her two sons starving for work, when there is so much of it to be done. If you will not let us work, dear mother, we must look elsewhere for employment. I, of course, have had a taste of it—but you are not doing right by Bertram. It is only his natural

goodness that will keep him out of mischief—and that not long.”

Because she had been telling herself this, Mrs. Lackland resented hearing it from her eldest son. She knew it was true. To yield up anything to these two boys at home, willing as she had been to do it abroad, meant yielding up everything. Yet Gregory felt that in the end his words must have some effect. He had a great reverence and respect for her, and fully appreciated the skill, energy, and perseverance that had accomplished so much. Nor was she by any means an elderly woman—being just a little over fifty. So he kept himself in the background, leaving her to debate the matter in her own mind. He fitted up a sort of laboratory and spent his hours dabbling with chemistry.

“I shall become one of those recluse scientists we read about,” he asserted laughingly, when his mother remonstrated with him. “There is no telling what great discovery I shall make in the end.”

Pauline and he had little in common. They often quarreled good-humoredly, for Gregory could not or would not be offended at anything she could say. He took things too lightly for a man of his years, thought the girl, with some contempt.

His mother had told him Pauline's story, and he felt a tender, heartfelt pity for her, such as one might feel for a wounded fledgling too early fallen from its nest. He treated her as if she were a child—and this itself was humiliating to the girl, used all her life to being addressed by men as their equal. She could not understand Gregory Lackland. If he had opinions, ideas, he expressed them openly, frankly, and this, again, nonplussed her.

One night, a fortnight after his homecoming, dinner had been announced some time, and all were waiting for him. Mrs. Lackland had sent once or twice to his room, and had ordered two of the servants to look for him. But he was not about the place. His mother was the soul of punctuality. She gave orders to have dinner served—Gregory could come in late if it pleased him. They had just finished their meal when the young man entered. He seemed depressed and sat down without a word.

"What is it?" asked the mother, a little anxiously.

"Nothing—nothing of any account," he answered readily enough. "At least not worth bothering about until we finish dinner."

"Where have you been since luncheon?"

"In the town. Over to the East Shore."

She knew the factory was meant—they classified the two big factories by these names—West Shore and East Shore.

"Oh! The men have been annoying you!"

Gregory said nothing. He pushed his cup away. Plainly, he was very much disturbed.

"What have they been saying?" asked Mrs. Lackland impetuously, when the servant had withdrawn. "I will know, Gregory."

"Oh, mother, it's all wrong," he said, in a constrained voice. "I saw Father Richards early in the day—and then I went into the factory. I talked to Williamson. Of course, they can live—they can manage to exist. But, heavens, mother——"

Mrs. Lackland's face grew hard.

"When you are master you can do as you please, Gregory. Until then I will have no meddling." She rose, and stood leaning against the table. "I am tired of this interference," she went on. "I want you to understand it, as well as Pauline. And that brings me to a decision I have arrived at within the last few days. It is my express wish—my command—that you continue to stay away from the factory people altogether, Pauline. My

managers say that things have been going much better recently." And she left the room without waiting for a reply.

"I do not understand mother," said Bertram. "She is so kind-hearted naturally—and yet she seems to think the factory people slaves."

"Why don't you tell her so?" said Gregory irritably.

"My dear brother," said the young man, with all the patronage of his twenty-one years in his voice, "our mother has no use for the enlightened progress of these times."

"And have you?"

"I hope so. We are all brothers, all free and equal."

"Rot!" said Gregory.

The evening bade fair to end in a family squabble. Bertram met Pauline's glance, and he imagined there was mockery in the smile she gave him. His eyes blazed angrily. He rose.

"I am going to The Pines," he said, "either of you coming?"

"No," said Pauline, "I am tired."

"No," said Gregory shortly.

"It is strange that Mrs. Sigogne has not been here since you came home," he continued in an

injured tone to Gregory. He was annoyed. He had been to The Pines twice last week and had met no one. All the pleasant intimacy seemed at an end—he could not even catch a glimpse of Helen.

And then he called wounded vanity to his aid. What did he care—he did not love her; he was not one to fall in love so easily! So he buried himself anew in his questions of social and political economy. To-night he would risk another visit—for the last time, he told himself.

“You are not trying to nurse the immortal flame of liberty, equality, and fraternity in my brother’s bosom, I see,” remarked Gregory, somewhat disagreeably to Pauline as they rose and went into the drawing-room together.

Pauline pressed her mouth together, as was her habit.

“You are going to try to quarrel with me, too?” she said then. “I have no interest in your brother’s affairs.”

Voices interrupted them. Bertram, with a serene and smiling countenance, opened the door for Mrs. Sigogne and Helen, who had evidently just arrived.

“Oh, Pauline!” she exclaimed, advancing to the

girl's side, with a charming smile. "I am going to scold you and scold you well! I have not been here in an age—have been just as ill as I could be, but no one from Lyndhurst comes to inquire about me!"

"Upon my word," protested Bertram, "I called twice—I did indeed, and both times they told me you were not at home—nor Miss Helen, either," with a reproachful glance at the lovely girl.

Then Marion Sigogne, releasing Pauline's hand, held out her slim fingers to Gregory.

"I am delighted to see you," she said pleasantly. "But I am offended, too. I could not come and you would not. You have been at home so long—do you care so little for your old friends?"

Without waiting for a reply, she asked for Mrs. Lackland.

"I will call her," said Pauline quickly.

"No, no—Bertram, you must go," said Helen quickly. "If Pauline gets away she's apt to stay too long—and I am famished for a chat with her." Gregory was so plainly upset and disturbed that Marion Sigogne could not but note it. She was ignorant of the little annoyances that had preceded her visit, and attributed his manner to another cause. No one but she and Gregory knew how

✓ embarrassing was this situation, but the best way out of a disagreeable situation is to ignore it, and this she proceeded to do. Mrs. Lackland entered. Her guest was brilliant, good-humored, elegant—and all the time she was secretly comparing the silent Gregory Lackland before her with the one she had known in the past. There was no trace of grief or care upon that forehead. The firm chin, the lips with their proud smile, the brown eyes with golden gleams in them—all showed a quiet self-confidence, a manly self-possession. Only the deep furrows between the eyebrows showed that his life had not always been peaceful. The conversation became general, and in spite of himself Gregory was drawn into it. Marion spoke of the difficulty she had in straightening out her affairs. She spoke of herself as a matron occupied with many important matters, as if the thoughts of youth were far behind her. Her words sounded odd. To hear her and to look at her was to question her sincerity.

“The place is simply going to ruin,” she said. “You know how poor Paul loved it,” she addressed herself to Mrs. Lackland. “His heart was really wrapped up in it. It came before Helen or myself, in his estimation. And now to see it in this con-

.

dition. I can't seem to get any suitable man at all——”

“Let Gregory help you,” said Mrs. Lackland quietly.

A slight flush crept into Gregory's olive cheek. Marion's eyes were hidden.

“Oh, I could not think of imposing——”

“My time is utterly valueless at present,” said the young man. “I will be glad to assist you—— out of the worst of the tangle, at any rate.”

Pauline noticed his attitude. This did not seem like the Gregory Lackland she knew. Unconsciously she studied them, wondering what had transpired between them, what misunderstanding? Marion Sigogne was young and beautiful—— Gregory Lackland young and handsome. Mrs. Lackland would surely welcome her as a daughter. But there was a curious expression on Gregory's face which the girl found hard to fathom. It was not Marion Sigogne's intention to seem to care how Gregory Lackland looked or acted. She thanked him quietly, and then drifted off into another topic with Mrs. Lackland.

“Has Mr. Stanhope been here recently?” she asked. “He, too, has deserted us. We are to see a good deal of him this winter unless something

unexpected turns up. He is quite taken with your little niece," she added, in an undertone. "That would not be a bad solution of your difficulty," she added. "They are of sympathetic tastes, and at least," with a low laugh, "he is too well content with the good things of this world to wish to deprive himself of any of them by foolish notions."

"As to that, the girl can make her own choice," said Mrs. Lackland quietly. "She has been harried and pushed about all her life. Now she shall do just exactly as she pleases."

"That is rather dangerous. I would not like to say that of Helen. She might choose the wrong one."

"Ah! There is a difference of a score of years in judging there, although only three actually," said Mrs. Lackland. She sighed a little. "My poor Pauline!"

"The longer you stay here, the longer you defer helping her," said Marion in a kind tone. "Why won't you take a rest, dear Mrs. Lackland? Those two boys of yours are men now, and must have men's work to do. Why should Gregory have time to bother with my affairs, when yours are so many and so varied? Their father would want to see them settled . . ."

"I tell myself that so often," agreed Mrs. Lackland, with a sigh. "And it was to make some arrangements of that sort that I had Masterson here. But my courage failed me at the last moment. I have never been an idle woman, Marion, and I have the grip of things so securely in my grasp that I can't bear to let them go. I am trying to decide. Why didn't Gregory stay in London, where things were shaping themselves so well under his direction? He has given me no explanation, save that the life was unbearable from sheer laziness. Imagine that!"

"You are doing your very best to ruin your two sons," said Marion Sigogne. "Don't be offended at my remarks—I am privileged. But this can not last. You will estrange them, surely. Bertram is naturally indolent, a dreamer, I take it—but when something—or some one—arouses him from his dream, what then? You must have an answer ready."

"You speak as if our positions were reversed," said Mrs. Lackland in a vexed voice.

"God forbid," said the younger woman. "I hate business—I couldn't add a column straight to save my life. The very thought of you—just the thought—oppresses me so that I have to plunge

into some wildly foolish scheme to avoid being depressed. How *can* you stand it? And manage things? I would go mad!"

Her earnestness was so unfeigned that Mrs. Lackland smiled.

"At least I am contemplating a change," she said. "When that house of mine is finished I shall plunge with you, just for the sake of the experience. I know I shall be sick of the whole thing in a fortnight, but for Pauline's sake——"

Marion nodded.

"When do you leave Lyndhurst?"

"If nothing happens, this day week."

"That's good—although The Pines seems particularly desirable just now. I am enjoying these few days—the last two or three excepted—but of course one can not be well always. And Helen is so devoted—she simply would not leave me."

They were silent then—watching the others. Gregory sat a little apart, a thoughtful expression on his face, plainly preoccupied. Marion Sigogne glanced at him casually, and then, seeing that he was not observing her, more keenly. Pauline and Helen were listening to Bertram's description of some college happening, and Helen's face was wreathed with smiles. Not so Pauline's. Marion's

eyes strayed from Gregory's face to the girl's and back again, curiously. He was so thoughtful, so earnest—how strange that they had, apparently, at least, so little in common.

"She is an odd girl," thought Marion. "I do not think she will ever be happy."

CHAPTER VII

THE DAYS BETWEEN

FOR the next few days Gregory spent much time at The Pines, trying to straighten out Mrs. Sigogne's tangled affairs. He did not ask himself why they were so tangled, nor did he give her any advice on how to avoid tangling them. He was calmly practical, friendly, pleasant—nothing more. For that which was past he entertained neither anger nor resentment. "Who would resent what is forgotten?" he asked himself. His heart was in no danger—therefore, in acknowledging Marion's charm and youthful beauty, why was not a certain friendship permissible between them?

Regarding his own personal interests he was in a quandary. He had not broached the subject to his mother, but he felt a sense of injury. It was his right to step into his father's shoes, to take the reins which his father had relinquished. He was fitted for the life, and he did not consider it justice to himself or to his brother to be kept in the background, to fill any gap which his mother might choose to open for him. He had the sense

of order, the practical business ability. He knew that she was right and just in the administration of affairs, but there were so many things to which she seemed perversely blind. She did not have a man's view, he thought, and then chided himself for unfair criticism. But he was right. She left too much in the hands of others; she made rules which were inflexible, and the ones in whom she put her trust exceeded their authority.

It could not last—he knew that. So to occupy the “days between” as he classified them, he took care of Marion Sigogne's affairs. Of one thing he was positive—he would not go to the city with them, to dance attendance on the fair young widow and Pauline, the serious. Bertram could do that to perfection—any one could see that he asked nothing better than to run when little Helen nodded. But Gregory was a man.

He saw much of Helen during those days, and realized that under her arch and mischievous manner there existed a very tender heart. She was much attached to her stepmother, and perhaps Gregory's views of Marion Sigogne changed a little when he realized in what a light Helen regarded her. Apparently unconscious of her own sweet loveliness, she thought Marion supremely

beautiful. She was, too, the soul of gentleness and courtesy toward the servants and even to Gregory himself.

"Our affairs seem to be giving you a lot of trouble," she said to him one day. "Papa always said he wished mother had better developed business instincts. But then one can't have everything."

"No, indeed," he answered, smiling. He had some papers in his hand, which he was glancing over, and laid aside his cigar when she came up to him on the terrace. With a little grimace she picked up the weed and handed it to him.

"Please don't let it go out on my account," she said. "You do certainly smoke a great deal. Papa used to also—and I like it."

"You are as sensible as you are charming," he answered, smiling at her.

"Thank you." They were interrupted by the sound of a horse's galloping.

"Why, that is Bertram!" said Helen ingenuously. "I know Soliman's step."

"Oh! You do!" laughed Gregory teasingly. "What a trained ear you must have!"

Helen blushed and pouted. Both looked toward the avenue of pines that led to the gate. Bertram

Lackland slipped from his horse and led him to the foot of the steps. The smile on Helen's face and her heightened color, and the free-and-easy air with which Gregory regarded him, acted rather unpleasantly on the young man.

"It is quite by accident that I turned in here," he began. "Soliman seemed to be determined to visit you."

Helen laughed blithely, mockingly.

"Let Soliman make his own excuses, then," she said. "And since I must thank Soliman, I shall not say I am glad to see you."

"Oh, I can not stay—I must go back immediately."

"I'm sorry. Mr. Stanhope is coming, and Pauline, too, this afternoon. We're all going to Squaw Island, and Gregory will teach me how to use a rifle. But if you are busy, I'm afraid we'll have to do without you."

Bertram did not take this in good parts. He flushed angrily, and stood with his hand on Soliman's neck. He looked so like a school-boy who had been reprimanded, that Gregory barely suppressed a laugh. He could not realize that Bertram was on the verge of manhood—the six years' difference in their ages made him feel so much the

older of the two. Helen glanced at him and saw the frown on his forehead. She shrugged her shoulders carelessly.

"I must go in," she said. "I have something important to do—before Mr. Stanhope comes."

There was a teasing little smile on her lips as she said this. The next moment Gregory was looking with amusement into his brother's angry face.

"You foolish lad!" he said. "Don't you see she is just laughing at you—she doesn't mean it?"

"She won't laugh at me very long," said Bertram furiously. "I shan't give her the chance again in a hurry."

He leaped on Soliman as he spoke and the next minute was tearing down the avenue.

"Helen, Helen, you are a little mischief-maker!" said Gregory, half-aloud. "What are you doing to poor Bertram?"

Once or twice, in company with Mrs. Sigogne, Julian Stanhope had called at Lyndhurst, but each time Pauline evaded him. It was therefore with some displeasure that she saw him seated in Marion Sigogne's drawing-room later that day. Bertram, repenting of his hastiness, accompanied Pauline, while Helen, who had felt sure of his return, pretended to ignore him, and played with

Carlos, lying at her feet, or did her best to flirt with Gregory, who, while not responding in the least to her efforts, was highly amused at the glowering eyes of the young man seated opposite him. He knew that while Helen was enjoying the game hugely, it was driving Bertram into a desperate mood. He fell in somewhat diffidently with their plans for the afternoon—rather out of a mildly questioning attitude regarding Bertram and Helen than from any amusement he might find in the jaunt. True, he had vaguely promised the young girl to show her how to handle the small, silver-mounted toy which her stepmother had given her on a preceding birthday, but he knew that she would not require much of his attention—nor expect it.

Squaw Island was at its best, and this was an ideal autumn afternoon. The walk through the woods toward the little bay where the boats were tied was beautiful. Helen and Carlos led, and Bertram soon caught up with the girl. By a glance Marion had signified her wish that Gregory remain beside her, and so Pauline had no choice of a companion. Marion and Gregory chatted gaily. Pauline stayed as close to them as possible, so that Julian Stanhope might join in their conversation,

rather than depend on her for entertainment. He was particularly brilliant this afternoon—being, above all things, a good talker, not alone conversing well himself, but drawing the best from others. The main topic was the coming winter and all that was to be seen and done in the city. Gregory entered into their prospects with every appearance of good will. Pauline alone was silent—even Bertram and Helen were side by side now—she alone felt out of her element; through her own wish, her own fault, she told herself calmly and without bitterness.

Marion was not averse to loitering behind at the island. She was an idler, pure and simple, she confessed laughingly, and she paused under a big oak tree whose half-bare branches reared above her, the sunlight filtering through the leaves on her soft, dark hair, bringing out unexpected golden lights in it. Her eyes were very bright, her face gravely attentive.

"Besides," she added, "I don't know why, but it seems as if the mood is on me to talk of something which has occupied me very much lately. I wonder what you will think of it."

He shook his head.

"I am a poor guesser," he said.

"Gregory," she began, not looking at him, but reaching forward for the branch near her and plucking a leaf idly, "why are you satisfied to remain—as you are?"

He looked his astonishment.

"Your mother is strong, capable, earnest. She has no wish to yield the reins of government to either of her sons. And you—life might be so different for you. There is such power in store for the man who cares for it——"

He smiled grimly.

"I know the life I am fitted for."

"Oh, yes, perhaps you do—I know you do. Nevertheless, there is work for the man of parts to-day. Political life is an attraction—it would be for me, I know, if I were a man. Judge Masterson has much influence and then (there are my people) —the Governor——"

He drew a deep breath.

"I do not know whether to be flattered or amused," he said. "I am not fond of politics, I shall never take part in them. Mine is a much humbler ambition: one which I am fitted for. I am to fill my father's place in the world."

"A manufacturer? Any one can be that!"

"An employer of men—a just, honest, liberal

master, who will sympathize with his fellow-laborers."

"Leave that to Bertram," she said gently. "You are to reach a higher scale—attain a nobler purpose. Not to do good to a few thousand souls, but to many thousands—to make just laws and have them enacted—to benefit your country . . . Ah! Forgive me! My dreams are past. Helen will soon go to a home of her own; she is young, wealthy, beautiful, and I shall be left to my own devices. Can I not, my dear friend, think of a glorious future for you and rejoice in it?"

She did not look at him, but he bent his eyes upon her, and in spite of herself she was forced to meet them.

"No," he said calmly, "there is no future for me over which you can enthuse. Once you could have bent me to your will. That time is past—but that it is past is not my fault. Was it yours, Marion Sigogne?"

In spite of her apparent self-control, her heart bounded with exultation. Then he had not forgotten, he had not forgotten!

"You have condemned me utterly?"

He smiled. There was no emotion in his eyes or in his face. And yet she must justify herself

—she dare not let this moment slip by. For she had loved him honestly, with the first love of her girlish heart, and he had been then as Bertram was now, young, ardent, impetuous. She was poor, as poor as she was lovely. Gregory, a boy at college, depending on his mother for everything, would have her wait for him until he could make a home for the woman he loved. Across this plan for the future came her uncle's friend, Paul Sigogne. His wealth was enormous—as his wife her every desire would be gratified. Here were power and luxury in her grasp and she accepted them. She told Gregory nothing—a brief note on her marriage-day conveyed the news to him, and from that time on she had seen nothing of him.

Yet she had done her duty. She was a faithful wife for six years, and had mourned her husband sincerely when he died. Gregory looked at her. She was more beautiful—than ever—and yet he had forgotten. He looked back upon the suffering of that year, with pity for the foolish boy who had spent the wealth of his heart on a phantom. This was not the girl he had loved—this lovely woman who was humbling herself before him.

“I do not know,” he answered now slowly. “You were right, perhaps. The unfledged school-boy

had no right to declare his love, he had no right to ask your affection. It was hard, then, but we learn wisdom with the years. Perhaps I should thank you for teaching it to me," he went on, with a smile. "And now"—with a glance ahead of him, "shall we go on? The others will wonder what is detaining us."

She bent her head. He did not look at her again, but her face said nothing. What she thought, what she had expected him to say, what intimacy she meant to create by touching on the past, he did not know. Gregory Lackland told himself, evenly, that the domestic hearth was not his vocation. He had things to do in the world that would make him a poor companion for any fireside.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BIRD OF PASSAGE

THE informal picnic at Squaw Island had turned out disastrously for all concerned. Helen had shown her pique plainly to Bertram, and, as is the way with foolish young lovers, each made a mountain out of a molehill. Pauline Faulkner had nothing beyond commonplaces for the man beside her, who, try as he might, could not arouse her to interest. Until, daringly, he spoke outright of Penniston, when she turned on him with flashing eyes.

"Mr. Stanhope," she said, "I am at your mercy, I suppose—but if you wish to speak of that man, I shall be forced to leave you."

"He sends word of those who are dear to you, Miss Faulkner. A message from your sister, Muriel——"

The girl trembled a little.

"I shall hear from her in good time—not through him."

"Forgive me, Miss Faulkner—I do not want to pain you."

There was a note of earnestness in his voice.

"It pains me to be reminded of him," she said.

"Then I shall never remind you of him," he said. "Above all things I would be your friend. Will you not let me be your friend? Who knows at what hour you may need some one faithful to your interests?"

"Friendship is not to be lightly proffered to a bird of passage," she answered. "I am only that."

"Oh, no—you have found your rightful place with us, I am sure. You are one of us now, forever and all time."

"I do not know," she said. With his words, a conviction of her really forlorn condition overwhelmed her. One of them? That could never, never be! She was a stranger, an alien, truly a bird of passage! Where was her father? What was happening to Muriel, whose name this stranger could mention so unexpectedly, so lightly? Was she happy or unhappy? After all, she thought, they were her kindred, and she loved them. She could not help it. She thought of the past, of her mother—of her mother's sad and sudden death—and her hands grew cold and an iron band seemed settling round her forehead. She stopped in the path.

"I am not well," she said. "I am afraid to go any farther. Will you please call Bertram?"

She breathed more freely when Julian Stanhope had left her. Oh, why had she come here, why, why? She turned and plunged blindly into the woods, and made her way over the underbrush to the shores of the little bay.

"Oh, I must do something, anything," she said aloud. "I can not stand this idleness, where every word has power to hurt me so! I must work. Work is my vocation—no wonder I am unhappy. I must pray more. I must be better." And then a little sob broke from her. "It is so hard to be alone, it is so hard to be alone! Perhaps if I were near Muriel—if I could only be near Muriel——"

She paused. Muriel's husband was a necessary part of Penniston's scheme—poor Muriel but a pawn in the game he was playing. Who knew what Muriel might be enduring now. . . . And she dared not ask, she dared not listen! She had promised Mrs. Lackland to hear nothing from that man. But oh! if she could but know that Muriel was happy!

They found her seated on the edge of the little boat a half hour later. Stanhope was vexed.

"You gave me quite a fright, Miss Faulkner,"

he said. "I had no idea where you had gone. You look ill—you have contracted a fever here. Let us get home as quickly as possible," he said, and Gregory Lackland looked up suddenly with frowning brows. In what a tone of authority he spoke! He glanced at Pauline. She sat staring straight in front of her, her cheeks burning, her dark eyes blazing with a strange light.

"Are you ill, Pauline?" he asked solicitously—and then he took her hand in his. It chilled him. With an exclamation of concern, he pulled the light coat she wore closely about her throat and buttoned it.

"You should be more careful," he chided. "Where will all your brilliant winter go if you have a serious illness now?"

They rowed over the little bay in silence. At the foot of the path leading to Lyndhurst, Bertram paused.

"I shall take Pauline home," he said stiffly. "And," with a cold glance at Helen, "I must say good-by to you now. I leave on the 8.40 train for the city."

"Rather unexpected, isn't it?" asked Stanhope dryly.

"Yes. I got word to go this morning."

"Well, a pleasant trip to you!"

"Thank you. It will surely be that." He said adieu to each in turn and then he and Pauline turned up the path.

"Let us go quickly," said the girl, with chattering teeth. "I am afraid I am really going to be ill, Bertram. Oh, do let us hurry!"

"Why didn't you say you felt so badly?" said Bertram, with perplexed anxiety. "Mother will be so distressed if anything happens to postpone our leaving Lyndhurst."

But Pauline was not listening. The kindness of Mrs. Lackland to this girl was a misplaced one. Her brain was seething with thoughts and problems, her whole nervous, irritable temperament tried to its utmost by enforced idleness. She spoke truly when she said that work was her vocation—work of any kind. The discovery that Julian Stanhope knew of her unhappy past, her connections, the very fact that he knew even now where Muriel was and what she might be suffering. . . . Strangely enough, she never thought of her as happy.

With some perturbation Mrs. Lackland went to the girl's room a few moments after she came in. Pauline was lying, dressed, upon the bed, her great

gray eyes like stars in her waxen face. She put her arms around Mrs. Lackland's neck with a childish gesture.

"He knows . . . about Muriel. Julian Stanhope knows about Muriel. But I would not let him tell me because . . . I promised. I promised you. Won't you find out for me, Aunt Laura? My heart is breaking for news of her."

Mrs. Lackland felt her eyes grow moist. She kissed the girl with lips that trembled.

"My poor child," she said, "why did you not ask? I would not want you to carry your promise that far, dear."

"But it was—it was Penniston who sent the message," she faltered. "So I could not listen."

"I shall send a note to Mr. Stanhope at once and inquire," said Mrs. Lackland quickly. "You must be taken care of first."

Helen, a little depressed and upset, was not at all displeased that Julian Stanhope left them at the big gate, so that she might go off alone to muse over Bertram Lackland's sudden and unreasonable stubbornness. Gregory stood on the terrace saying good-by to Mrs. Sigogne.

"Then you will not dine with us?" she said re-

gretfully. "And that bad boy brother of yours—I suppose he and Helen have quarreled? Foolish children!"

"I think I will return home—Pauline looked quite ill, and my mother is very much wrapped up in her. She is a nice little girl, though so very distant and reserved. She seems to compel one's liking."

"Evidently Julian Stanhope thinks so," laughed Marion Sigogne. He did not see the sudden dilation of the pupils, nor catch the swiftly inquiring glance she gave him.

"Julian Stanhope!" said Gregory. "You mean——"

"He is simply head over heels in love with her."

"Stanhope! Why . . . Stanhope . . . that never struck me."

Again Marion laughed.

"Of course it didn't—I don't think even Pauline has discovered it yet."

Gregory said good-night later, and walked home with a new thought in his brain. Stanhope, the cold, proud Stanhope, to marry Pauline Faulkner! Well, why not? He was wealthy, well-connected according to all reports, ambitious; he knew that he had been mentioned for several high positions,

for his friends seemed to be many. It would mean an active life for the girl—the life she loved.

He was crossing the little bridge that separated the Lyndhurst property from that of The Pines when he saw some one coming toward him. It was Bertram.

“Where in the world are you going?” he exclaimed. And then, with a sudden thrill of anxiety: “Pauline——”

“I am going to The Pines,” said Bertram. “Was Stanhope there when you came away?”

“No, he did not go in—he left before I did,” said Gregory. “But why?”

In a few words Bertram explained the situation. He did not seem at all relieved to discover that it would not be necessary to complete his journey. Still, his pride would not allow him to pretend that he had not met his brother—even for the sake of another glimpse of Helen.

“Are you really going to the city?” asked Gregory, as they went on together toward Lyndhurst.

“Yes, I am,” said Bertram crossly. “And you know the reason why, too.”

“I know!” exclaimed Gregory. “You and Helen have had a tiff, I suppose.”

“It isn’t that. But she thinks she can annoy me

by flirting with any one she pleases. First you, then Stanhope! I suppose she considers me good game. Well, she'll find out!"

"Oh, you boy, don't be so foolish. You're a pair of silly geese, the two of you!"

"H'm! That's good—after encouraging her—you knew she was doing it to make me angry."

"Doing what?" cried Gregory, in bewilderment.

"Why, we've been planning going to Squaw Island every day for the past week that I might teach her shooting. And to-day . . ."

Gregory laughed heartily.

"Well, just as much as I taught her was just as much as she intended me to teach her," he said. "And if you can't read through all those tantalizing, saucy little ways of hers, she's going to lead you a pretty dance. But if I were you," with a sudden smile, "I would go to the city anyhow. It may do more good than you imagine."

The physician summoned by Mrs. Lackland gave no definite statement as to Pauline's condition. It was impossible to tell how the sickness would develop. He seemed to fear complications.

His fears were not realized, however. Pauline's fine constitution triumphed over her illness. She was allowed to come downstairs three days after-

ward. Stanhope had been unceasing in his inquiries, and on his first call had given Mrs. Lackland Penniston's message.

"Muriel is well and happy and never ceases to pray that she and her sister will soon be together."

It cheered Pauline, and lifted a heavy burden from her heart. Of her father there was no word—if Penniston knew his whereabouts he had not spoken of them. Marion was there every day, so winsome and lovable that she became dearer than ever to Mrs. Lackland, who was quite attached to her. She knew of the early love affair between Gregory and Marion the girl. Marion the woman was infinitely more attractive, and she would have been well pleased had the young man shown any predilection for her society.

Things were not going smoothly at the factories these days. Whether it was Gregory's home-coming, and the unsettled state into which his apparent indifference threw the men, whether it was the absence of Pauline, not alone from the factories, but from the town itself, Mrs. Lackland did not know. At any rate, there were rumors of disaffection among the thousands of employees. Mr. Doring had been threatened on several occasions, though as yet there had been no act of violence.

She had received the written complaints from the committee, but had dismissed them when Doring explained the situation to her, and the discharge of Williamson and the three others who had called on her followed immediately, for Doring insisted that he must maintain discipline. She could feel that trouble was impending, and in some way connected Gregory with it. Well! She would show him that she was mistress still, and that her achievements in the business world had not been the work of chance.

But a new element was at work—a lawless element, that had never been in evidence before. Doring felt it, and Wilson, the manager of the West Shore factory. If Gregory knew this he said nothing about it, but went on his way serenely. He felt that it would be useless to appeal to his mother—either to her common sense or her sentiment. She must be taught by others, since she would not be advised by him.

Father Richards, the priest, who had his finger on the pulse of his people, was the most worried of all. He could not trace the trouble, though he tried to. Pauline had been one from whom he hoped much, until she proved to him what little influence she had with Mrs. Lackland. Then he,

too, depended on Gregory, but the young man did nothing. Shrugged his shoulders only—would say nothing against or for conditions.

When Pauline was allowed downstairs, Julian Stanhope came in to see her. He had pleaded strongly for a personal interview, as he was going away. Although her mind had been set at rest in regard to her sister through this man, the girl could not overcome her dislike for him. Nor could she analyze her dislike.

"I have a very fine post given to me," he began, "in the diplomatic corps. An entirely unexpected honor. I do not think the States will see much of me for the next few years."

He seemed elated. She smiled and congratulated him. He looked at her penetratingly.

"America does not agree with you, Pauline," he said then. "Will you leave it—with me? We can be married very quietly—no one will be any the wiser save our own immediate friends—and you—you will have placed an effectual barrier between yourself and—some one whom you dread."

Her face grew very white. It had been white before, but now it became ghastly.

"Oh, please!" she said. "Why—we are strangers!"

"No," he answered, and there was a flash of odd excitement on his face. "We are not strangers, Pauline. And I love you. I love you dearly. I can make you happy."

"I do not love you," she answered faintly. "And even if I did—I have no right to burden any one with the cloud that is hanging over me. You are very, very courageous, Mr. Stanhope, to wish to marry one of whom you know so little."

"I shall risk all that," he said. "I do not want to excite you, but you must know the truth some time. Pauline, Penniston is here."

"Penniston is here! In America!"

"Yes—not alone to try to see you, but following some one very near to you."

"My father!" she gasped.

He was alarmed then. He sprang to her side and took her trembling hands in his.

"Pauline, I have taken care of that. He is safe—he will be safe. I have sent him away—your father is awaiting us. He will welcome us gladly. I have found him a safe refuge."

The girl's head was throbbing madly.

"Please," she began, in a broken tone, "I must not let you go any farther, Mr. Stanhope. I do not care for you— Oh, I *couldn't* marry you!

Please, please do not be offended, but— I couldn't marry any one. Marriage is not for me!"

He sat looking at her a moment gently. He had gone too far, he thought, but it was a thing that had to be done quickly.

"So be it, then," he said, lifting her hand to his lips. "I will go without you. But, Pauline, I will come back again."

A sense of suffocation overpowered her. She looked at him, his eyes seemed to pierce her through and through; his nervous fingers clasped about her hand, seemed to burn her. He rose, still with his gaze fixed upon her—on the pale face, the waxen lids, the small mouth, faintly pink and very childish and young. Then he dropped the hand he held and left the room. The girl lay back quietly in the big chair. She was weak and exhausted. Presently, when she opened her eyes, she saw that Gregory had come in. He had taken a book and seated himself in the window near her.

"What has that fellow been saying to you?" he asked roughly. "You are as pale as a ghost. Hasn't he any sense?"

She smiled weakly.

"None. Absolutely none."

"I suppose you'll marry him?"

"And if I do?" with a sudden flash of spirit.
"Does that concern you?"

"No," he said, slowly, after a moment. "I have never given you any sympathy, never shown even friendliness toward you, Pauline. I am nothing to you, though we are supposed to be relatives. But that man—that man is not worthy of you."

The deep feeling in his tones touched her.

"I shall not marry him, Gregory. Love, happiness, home are not for me. I relinquished hope of them long ago. I am resting my broken wings here just for a little while, and then I shall fly off again somewhere, anywhere to the work that is mine."

"Your work, Pauline? Not the old life, surely?"

"I am through with that forever, Gregory. It was not my fault. Circumstances forced me into those channels. Oh, the peace that girl must know who is sheltered under her mother's roof, who kneels beside her mother and father in prayer, whose life is spent securely within the folds of our dear Church, bound lovingly by its tenets and its wise restrictions! My mother taught us secretly, and at night. We learned our few prayers secretly. We attended no Christian school, and we listened constantly to

the godless talk of the godless men and women who were our intimates! Thank God, I saw the triumph of faith in her death—when that priest came, and thrust aside all barriers to reach her, defying them to deny him admittance to one who called upon him for the last sacred rites! I led him to her side—and that one moment—the look on her face when she glanced up and saw him, husband, children, all forgotten—that moment made me a true Catholic forever.”

“Don’t, Pauline, don’t, dear child!” The tears were streaming down her face, the tears were in his eyes.

“I must,” she said. “I do not know how long I can stay here, and you, Gregory, must understand. In that moment I received a new baptism—that of desire, and when all else failed me I went to that good priest. But before he could help me your mother came. I took her coming as a sign from God, and I was obedient, only wanting to know God’s will. I came here, but months have passed, and my work is slipping from me. I can not be idle, Gregory. I can not be a butterfly. I can not go to the city and enjoy myself as your dear mother would want me to. I can not. But I say nothing. For I am waiting.”

“Then wait a while longer—just a little while longer,” he said deeply moved. “Wait until my work begins, Pauline, and perhaps you will find that yours is here, after all.”

CHAPTER IX

HELEN MAKES A PROMISE

BERTRAM had spent a trying week. Never, in all his twenty-one years, had seven days gone so slowly. He had fulfilled several commissions for his mother, and had gone over the house which was now awaiting their occupancy. He had one or two suggestions to make, but no fault to find, and he wrote home enthusiastically, telling his mother that she would be more than pleased with the way her orders had been carried out. He went to the theater almost every evening and called on several of his chums. But he took no interest in anything, to his own disgust. And finally the week was at an end, and he returned to Lyndhurst.

Every one was unfeignedly glad to see him. Light-hearted and gay, he unconsciously helped the other members of his household, all weighed down with more serious cares. He was unusually affectionate with his mother, noticing for the first time that she seemed worried, and that she excused herself right after dinner to go to her office, where she and Mr. Sands remained for the evening.

"Is there any truth in the rumor that there is trouble at the factories?" he asked Gregory. Gregory shook his head.

"Mother has said nothing," he answered.

"Had you been home a little earlier you would have met Mrs. Sigogne and Helen," put in Pauline gently. "They inquired for you particularly."

"Oh! Are they well?" asked Bertram, with a fine assumption of carelessness, which made Gregory laugh outright.

"They are well," answered Pauline, seriously. "But it seemed to me that Helen looked a little down-hearted."

"Oh! We told her Bertram was coming home," said Gregory teasingly.

* * * * *

Helen Sigogne sat under her favorite oak tree, watching the swans floating lazily on the bosom of the miniature lake before her. The book she had been reading lay open on her lap, and her soft cheek rested on one upturned palm. She was too deeply interested to hear the sound of a horse's hoofs on the road outside, although she looked toward the avenue of pines as the rider advanced between them. He saw her, but kept on to give his

horse to the servant, and then crossed the lawn to her side.

Bertram had been calculating very carefully what he meant to say to the girl, but the sight of her filled him with such pleasure that thoughts and words took wings.

"Is Mrs. Sigogne at home?" he inquired very stiffly and politely.

Helen answered just as politely.

"No. My mother has gone out and will not be back before dinner. Have you a message for her?"

"Oh, no! I simply called. I hope she is well?"

"Very well, thank you. How is Pauline? She seemed much better yesterday."

"When you were kind enough to ask for me—" he began.

"Oh, did we?" with an air of bored interest. "Yes . . . perhaps we were speaking of you."

The young man flared up into a mighty rage.

"I wish I had stayed home," he said doggedly.

"Why! Didn't you like the city?" innocently.

"Oh! The city! Yes. I'm going back to it."

"So soon?"

"Helen, you are exasperating! Or are you so heartless that you have never asked yourself why I kept away from The Pines for a whole week?"

"A whole week?" sweetly. "Is it really that long? How time flies!"

Bertram glanced at her. He turned on his heel as if to leave, but thought better of it.

"Why have you changed so toward me?" he asked. "It may be that you have tired of me altogether and you are treating me like this to get rid of me."

She fixed her lovely eyes upon him.

"Treating you like what?" she demanded. "I have done nothing. You take it into your head to grow angry with me—goodness knows why, and then expect me to plead with you not to be angry?"

"You are cruel—you deliberately flirt with Gregory to upset me, and then you will hardly notice me. You talk to and smile at that Stanhope fellow and completely ignore me! Why, you simply drove me frantic—and then your indifference. . . . You actually do not care whether I stay here or go back to the city! It is all the same to you."

"Don't be nonsensical," she said. "You know well that you were in the wrong."

"Wrong or not, I have never spent a more miserable week."

"I am very glad of it," she said. "It will teach you to have some sense next time—and Bertram, you do, honestly, need sense."

"My dear girl, what little sense I have simply vanishes when you get angry at me."

"But I wasn't angry at you. I was only vexed."

"Then we are friends again?"

He looked at her with tender eyes. She blushed, and made room beside her on the bench.

"I shall be twenty-two next month," he said, "and I want you to decide whether I shall be the happiest or the most miserable man in the universe. On that day, my darling, you must allow me to announce our engagement."

"Oh!" said Helen. "Mother will never permit that. I am not eighteen yet, Bertram."

"What obstacle is that when we love each other?"

"Oh, do we?" with a serene air. "You have not said so—nor have I."

"Helen, you know I love you!"

"I think you think you love me," she answered.

"But you must prove it."

"And how?" seriously. "Oh, how?"

"Why," she said, "I could never marry an idler, a drone! You will be twenty-two next month,

Bertram Lackland, and you have never done a day's work in your life."

He looked at her questioningly.

"I don't believe in that, Bertram. No man can be happy if he isn't busy. Idleness is all very well, for a short while, but one must have an aim in life. You shoot, play billiards, and tennis, cards occasionally, go horseback riding, read a good deal and spend a lot of time talking about the equality of the human race! That's no life for a healthy, active man of twenty-two!"

"What do you want me to do, Helen?"

"I want you to show that you can do your share in the world. Mother says that Gregory will not stay here, that he has big schemes in view, that he will go into politics. So you must go into business. Your mother's business, if she'll allow it, and if she doesn't, into something of your own."

"That is sound advice, Helen. What business would you suggest?"

"What business are you fitted for?"

He pondered a moment, carefully considering. Then the question came home to him with a keen sense of shame.

"None," he admitted. The girl looked at him,

the wisdom that is ever the portion of the woman in her glance.

"You are dependent on your mother for everything, you have no settled employment beyond amusement, you are fitted for no business—and yet you want me to marry you!"

The young man flushed hotly.

"You are right," he said. "I see my position, and I am glad you opened my eyes to it. Helen, I never realized what a careless, miserable life I was leading before. But I shall change it—and I will ask you again to marry me when I have something beside a pair of useless, idle hands to offer you. And," he added, in a moved tone, "you will realize that all I try to do or be, whether I succeed or fail, will be because I love you with all my heart. Do you care for me, Helen?"

"Yes," she answered gently. "Of course I care for you, Bertram."

They sat for an hour discussing ways and schemes, and finally the young man left her with a light heart. Gregory was outdoors, smoking, when he reached the house. He went up to him with outstretched hands.

"Gregory, Gregory!" he said. "I am so happy that I could not begin to tell you of it! Helen

loves me, and I must get out and go into business and become self-supporting and all that, and then we are going to be married! Isn't that a grand prospect?"

Gregory threw away his cigar.

"I should say so," he answered, laughing. "My congratulations! And how about the theories to which you were to devote your life?"

"Oh, I have something serious on hand now," said Bertram. "I have no more time to waste on social problems. Leave that to such men as Stanhope and his kind. Where is mother?"

"Mr. Stanhope himself is with her," said Gregory dryly. "Perhaps advocating the views which you have just discarded."

"And where is Pauline?"

"About the grounds, I believe. She went off toward the bay some fifteen minutes since—but if I were you I would see mother first."

Just then Mrs. Lackland appeared at the window behind them.

"Is that you, Bertram? Is that your horse there?"

"Yes, mother—I am just taking him to the stables."

"I wish you would not take him there—I have

an important message to send to Mr. Doring. Will you deliver it?"

"Why, of course."

"He is to meet Mr. Wilson and Judge Master-son here this evening at eight o'clock without fail. And, Bertram?"

"Yes?"

"If you could manage to get the message to him without being overheard. I daresay they will suspect something, but be as circumspect as possible."

Gregory Lackland stood up, straight and tall and proud, his eyes fixed on his mother. Bertram went down the steps and sprang on his horse's back.

"Is this the use to which you mean to put your sons always—you give them the rôle of errand boys? Well I finish Mrs. Sigogne's affairs to-morrow. After that I shall make a change."

They measured glances an instant, but Gregory's eyes were hard and his lips set in determined curves.

"You shall not set me aside for such men as Wilson or Doring," he said in a low, even tone. "You shall not belittle my ability and lower my

self-esteem. I love and respect you, mother, but in justice to myself I shall have to act as my conscience dictates."

"I did place you. You could have made something—anything of yourself had you stayed——"

"Abroad! Yes! An alien! Doing work that any alien could do—that the man who was my subordinate in the office does equally as well. I came home because my place is home—here. This is my rightful place. This is the place my father would have given me. I do not ask it, save of your own free will—and you are not disposed to give it. Do not blame me, therefore, for anything I find myself forced to do."

"At least we understand each other," she said, with white lips. "I suppose I should be thankful for that much."

"At least, mother, when you think it over you will see that I am right. I told you some time ago that I would decide on a plan in the near future. Your affairs are in sore straits. You have no idea what acts reckless men will commit. Perhaps you think that I am ignorant? Why, every man in that factory—in both those factories—knows that you mean to declare a lockout. You may not know what that means. I do. The date

will barely be decided to-night, when they will find it out . . .”

“So!” she said. “Then there is a traitor in my own household! I have long suspected it.”

She gave him a cold glance and turned away. Gregory shrugged his shoulders and went back to his chair.

CHAPTER X

A MESSAGE

JULIAN STANHOPE had come to Lyndhurst to ask Pauline Faulkner's hand in marriage once more. This time he laid his proposition before Mrs. Lackland and explained his prospects. She listened with something like pleasure—at least this was the solution of one difficulty. She could see how very little Pauline enjoyed the prospect of leaving Lyndhurst, and she, herself, harassed on every side, had small taste for frivolity. If Pauline could really care for Julian Stanhope it would be a good thing. True, she had waived the thought aside when Marion Sigogne spoke of it before, but then she had felt that Pauline and he were antagonistic. She did not want to force her in any way, but if the girl were not indifferent . . .

So, somewhat abstractedly, for her own affairs weighed upon her, she listened to the man. She had not known him long. Only a few months. He had come to her as a student of sociology seeking information, which she, the employer of men, could give him. She gave freely. He was essentially of

the classes—his views were hers, a thing which pleased her greatly. He was not like Gregory, continually grumbling. He had so purposely avoided meeting Pauline that she took him to be a woman-hater as well, until the night when he had introduced himself into her family circle with a message from Mrs. Sigogne. He had met Mrs. Sigogne at the Springs, and she was loud in her praise of him. He was so agreeably entertaining that he was made a welcome guest everywhere. Possibly the only one who disliked him was old Judge Masterson.

Now, with Gregory's declaration in her ears, and the suspicion filtering through her brain that it was Pauline, perhaps, who had been in secret communication with those outside her home, Mrs. Lackland went back to where Julian Stanhope awaited her.

"You can tell my niece," she said, giving her the title of relationship which she had always accorded her in conversing with strangers, "that you have my consent to address her, and that if she likes you I will be only too glad to see you both married. I, in fact, think it a good arrangement. The girl is high-strung and nervous. You will have to be kind and forbearing—but her heart is pure gold."

"I realize that," he said, rising. "I thank you for your encouragement—and I feel that she is not indifferent. I will do my best to make her happy."

He met Pauline at the foot of the terrace steps. He said something in a tone too low for Gregory, still seated above them, to hear, and then she turned with him and they walked side by side to the gate. Gregory did not wait for her return, but got up and went in. He was in a state of great excitement himself, raging under a sense of injustice and hot anger. A thousand rash schemes presented themselves, but he had common sense enough to hold his anger down with a firm hand. He was reading in the library an hour later when Bertram came in and flung himself into a chair opposite him.

"Did you reach Doring all right?" asked his brother.

"Yes—I gave him the message. He seemed glad."

"Of course he did," said Gregory, with sarcasm. "He is not endangering his property."

"And not ours either," said Bertram, with a searching glance at his brother.

"So it appears," answered Gregory.

"Why do you put up with it?" began the young man. "What chance have I if you are indifferent?"

"What do you want me to do?" asked Gregory laying his book down on the table.

"Kick! Kick good and strong. It isn't fair to us!"

"Mother would thank Helen for her ability to rouse your ambition!" said Gregory with a smile. "But wait, Bertram. There may be a change very soon. I have seen it coming a long while, and when it comes you and I must be ready for it. There is more underneath all this than many suspect. Father Richards does, and he has told me."

The brothers sat talking quietly for a long while. Gregory realized that Helen's plain-speaking had aroused the boy's manhood, and that even in so short a time he was looking at life from a different viewpoint. At last they heard their mother's voice in the hall.

"Have you seen Miss Faulkner?" she asked the servant.

"Yes, madam. She came in with Mr. Bertram."

"And Mr. Stanhope——"

"Mr. Stanhope went a good while ago."

Mrs. Lackland entered the library.

"You are here, Bertram? Where is Pauline?"

"She was going to her own room, mother, when I saw her last."

"Was Mr. Stanhope with her when you met her?"

"No—I met Mr. Stanhope on the road. He said good-by to me—told me it was not likely he would see me again before he left."

Mrs. Lackland sat down heavily in the nearest chair.

"Then that girl has refused him!" she said.

Gregory had not spoken. Now his mother addressed him directly.

"I wish you would see her—she will listen to you. She should not let any of her nonsensical notions stand in the way of this marriage. Try to persuade——"

"I have already given her my opinion, mother," answered Gregory gently.

"And you said——"

"That the man is not worthy of her. I do not think he is a good man."

Stupefaction rendered Mrs. Lackland speechless. She stared at her eldest son with parted lips.

"He proposed to her some days ago—the first day she came downstairs."

"How well I am acquainted with the happenings of my household," said Mrs. Lackland in a bitter tone. "No wonder it is easy for all my intimate affairs to get abroad. As for Pauline," and her voice quivered, "she shall give me some explanation."

"Would you like your own daughter to marry that man?" interrupted Gregory.

She rose to her feet.

"Why do you not tell me now that you propose to marry her yourself?" she said stormily, and hurried from the room. Gregory looked at Bertram.

"Why not?" he asked.

Bertram said nothing. There was an anxious line between his eyebrows. He did not tell Gregory an incident that had happened to him on the homeward drive, and yet it worried him considerably. Just as he struck the outskirts of the town, and the road that led to Lyndhurst, a man had appeared from the thick underbrush and held up his hand to command attention. He said nothing—only gave Bertram a white envelope and disappeared. Looking at it, he saw that it was addressed to Pauline.

At first, the young man was greatly perplexed.

He thought of tearing it up, of calling after the man, who surely could not have gone far, and returning it. But he did neither of these things, and was still in doubt when he met Pauline herself at the foot of the terrace steps. This decided him, and he gave her the note without a word.

"From whom?" she asked.

"I do not know, Pauline," he answered.

She crumpled it tightly in her hand and went on up the stairs to her room. And in the center of the apartment she looked at the superscription. It was meant for her then. She threw herself upon her knees beside the bed.

"Give me strength, O God, to face whatever trial is before me, and to bear it for Thy sake," she whispered. "Make the way plain to me, that I may not falter in it, let the cost be what it will."

She rose to her feet and opened the envelope.

"I do not know if you will ever read these lines," began the writer. "But whether you do or not I shall contrive to see you. I will wait for you to-morrow night (Wednesday) outside the Lyndhurst gates. I shall wait from ten until midnight, and then if you do not come I shall find means to see you amid your wealthy and influential friends.

If there is one among them whose safety you prize,
I would counsel you not to disappoint me.

“PENNISTON.”

Half-fainting, the girl sat in her chair, the letter falling from her nerveless fingers to the floor. Presently two tears forced themselves from under her half-closed lids, and ran down her pale cheeks. What could she do? What in God’s name was she to do? Surely, surely, God must give her some sign now!

To-morrow night! Wednesday! Why, that was to-night! She had no time to think, no time to ponder, no one to take into her confidence. She must decide for herself. She could not even reach Father Richards—she could not go into the town without creating comment, inquiry. Oh, if she dared but tell Gregory—and then her heart contracted. Gregory! “If there is one among them whose safety you prize!” Oh, she prized his safety above her own, and for that safety’s sake, must try to discover what this man’s bold schemes were. What was he doing at Lyndhurst? Had she brought him here? Was it her presence that had involved these people in such danger? For if he had come seeking her, what more natural than that

he should work mischief to those who had befriended her?

She glanced at the clock as a step sounded on the stairs without. It was Mrs. Lackland coming up to dress for dinner. Their rooms adjoined, the door between stood open. Pauline picked up the fallen note quickly and had barely hidden it when Mrs. Lackland entered the room.

"Mr. Stanhope was talking to you a short while since?"

"Yes, Aunt Laura," said the girl mechanically.

"Gregory tells me that he proposed to you some days ago. If that is true, don't you think that you should have confided in me?"

"I—I meant to," stammered the girl. "But—I could not bring myself to speak of it."

"He is an honorable man, a wealthy man, too, I believe," went on Mrs. Lackland. She marveled a little at the girl's self-restraint—she was wont to fly into a passion over less catechising. "You would do well if you could think of him."

"But I can not, I can not," she said miserably.

"That settles it, then, I presume," returned the older lady in a cold voice. "I regret it very much." She turned into her room again, but paused on the threshold. "I do not want you to look upon this

as an accusation, Pauline, but I heard something this afternoon that hurt me sorely. Some one in this house is communicating with the factory people. I am told my plans are given out almost within an hour after they are decided on. I trust that you are not acquainted with the man or woman who could descend to so mean, so low an action!"

Pauline Faulkner stared at her a moment, not comprehending, and that bewildered, shocked glance told the woman more plainly than words that her suspicions, if she really had any, were unfounded. The girl did not grasp her meaning, did not yet realize that she was indirectly alluding to herself.

"Now, remember," she went on, before Pauline could speak, "I do not want you to take this to yourself—you must not. But if there is any one here capable of such—such trickery, and you discover his identity, I want you to feel that you will not betray any cause by putting me on my guard. We have arrived at a crisis, and the next few weeks will decide whether I am to rule the men or the men to rule me."

Pauline looked at her gravely.

"Since the day you have forbidden it I have

never set foot in the town, except on Sunday mornings to Mass," she said. "I know you will believe me. As for suspecting any one in the household of being a spy—I can't think of any one, Aunt Laura. The last I saw of people connected with the factory was on the day when Mr. Williamson and the others were here. In fact," she went on, still in that calm, passionless voice, "Father Richards advised me strongly to do just as you wished."

"Thank you, my dear child," said the older woman in a gentler tone than she had used heretofore. "And forgive me if I seemed harsh about Mr. Stanhope. I should, indeed, dearly love to see you well settled, but I must not expect to have all things as I would like them."

"I can not tolerate Mr. Stanhope," said Pauline. "And I will never marry him. I will not drag any man into my unhappy life."

"If it is not Mr. Stanhope it must be some one else," said Mrs. Lackland with a smile. "There is nothing in your past that you need be ashamed of. There is much unhappiness, true—much unnecessary unhappiness. But that is all. You are a fit wife for the best man in the world, Pauline. You have reached the end of your journeyings now, my dear."

CHAPTER XI

FACE TO FACE WITH THE ENEMY

DINNER was a constrained meal that evening. Pauline, sad and abstracted, sat silent, eating nothing. Bertram watched her anxiously. He would have liked much to know what the note had contained, and he reproached himself more than once for delivering it.

"Will you ride over to The Pines with me?" he asked Gregory, toward the close of the meal. "I promised Helen that I would return this evening."

"Yes," said Gregory indifferently enough. "Do you care to come, Pauline?"

"I am tired," she said. "Will you tell Helen so? I will see her some time to-morrow."

She managed to get in a word with Bertram.

"Promise me to say nothing of that note to Gregory," she whispered. "I must have your word, Bertram."

"I wish you would not ask it, Pauline. I am afraid——"

"I shall tell him myself," she answered, "when

the time comes—it won't be long. Only please don't say anything about it yet."

"I promise then," he said reluctantly. "Still, I feel that I am not wise in giving such a promise."

"You will not regret it, Bertram, I assure you," she answered, and she breathed more freely, for volatile as Bertram was, he prided himself on the honor of his word. She went upstairs to her room. It was barely eight o'clock. From ten until midnight, he had said, and she dared not leave until the house was quiet, until there was no danger of her being seen or heard. She listened to the repeated ringing of the bell—one after the other the three men whom Mrs. Lackland had sent for were ushered into her office—the two managers and Judge Masterson. She could understand now the bitterness on Gregory's face when he acceded to his brother's request. How he must feel this! How he must feel being ignored and slighted in this fashion! Bertram, too, would in time, and the girl marveled at the shortsightedness of this otherwise far-seeing woman. How blind she was to her own real interests! She had grown so to love the power she possessed that she dreaded parting with a tithe

of it. Gregory, she knew, had entirely opposite views to those his mother entertained. His hand on the helm would mean a complete revolution in the conduct of the concern. Therein lay the whole trouble.

Pauline tried to read, tried to distract her mind, but could not. She counted the moments—and oh, they went so slowly! She strove to pray, but the prayers would not come. At ten o'clock she had worked herself into a fever heat of unrest and apprehension. At eleven she heard Mrs. Lackland bidding her guests good-night. She came slowly upstairs, as if she were tired. A moment after entering her room she called softly to Pauline.

"Yes, aunt?"

"Are you in bed, my dear?"

"Not yet—I was reading," she answered slowly.

"Oh, go to bed, child! But if you hear me in the night I wish you would come in. I do not feel sick, but my head is heavy and there is a nasty throbbing in my ears. I may have caught cold."

"I am a very light sleeper, Aunt Laura—I will hear you," said the girl gently. "Is there anything I can do to help you now? Can I bathe your head?"

"There isn't any pain—just numbness. It will pass off, I imagine, but it is unusual. Do I hear the boys downstairs?"

"Yes, aunt. They are going to their rooms—they have just come in."

"I'm glad they're in. Go to bed, you, and don't think too much or read too much, either."

"Yes, aunt, I am going."

"That's a good girl. Good-night, dear."

"Good-night."

She listened to the various sounds dying out—the voices of the two young men in their rooms directly under hers—her aunt moving about her own room, and then the sound of her regular breathing, showing that she had fallen asleep immediately. She glanced at the clock. It lacked ten minutes of midnight. Her hands grew cold. If she were not there at the hour he might try to see her—he might even venture into the house!

She went to her closet and drew out a long dark cloak, which she fastened about her, drawing its hood closely around her head. She turned the light out, then, and tiptoed to the landing. As she stole softly down the stairs, she noted, in dismay, that there was a stream of light coming over Greg-

ory's door. He was still awake. The fact sent a shudder through her. "If there is one among them whose safety you prize!" She shrank back into the alcove in a panic, for she heard him moving, and the next moment he stood peering out through the half-opened door into the dark hall.

"Is any one there?" he called out.

Pauline dared not stir. He waited another moment, listening, and then closed the door, evidently thinking that he had made a mistake. She stole past swiftly. She knew better than to try to get out through the double-locked doors, but she could unbolt the long swinging window in the drawing-room and step out on the terrace. It would be an easy way to return, too—if she came back, she thought, with a shudder. She did not doubt that in meeting this lawless man she took her life in her hands.

She was panting when she reached the great gates, and stood leaning against them, trying to gain breath and strength. The moon had risen, the road was flooded with light. She peered about her anxiously. She could see no one. Where was the creature she dreaded? Had he grown tired of waiting? It was only a little after the hour—he

would surely not have gone so soon. . . . Then her heart seemed to stand still, for a form slowly detached itself from the surrounding shrubbery. It looked curiously like that of Julian Stanhope. His name faltered on her lips.

"Mr. Stanhope," she began tremblingly.

But Julian Stanhope's clear, sharp, American tones did not answer her. Instead, came the low musical drawl she hated and feared.

"Are you keeping tryst with two, Pauline?"

She shivered, and clasped the gate for support.

"I have waited since ten for you. I had almost given you up."

"I could not get away—not until everything was quiet."

"Oh, I knew you would come! You have no lack of courage, Pauline Faulkner."

"At least the best way to conquer an evil is to face it," she said.

"Then in your sight I am an evil?" he said, with a disagreeable laugh.

"The only one that has ever threatened me," she answered bravely.

"Ah! Why court it in this wise, then?"

"For the sake of those who have been kinder

than my own flesh and blood," she answered steadily. "I would not have harm come to the ones who have sheltered and cared for me in my sore need."

"They have made you independent, at any rate, Pauline. Luxury and safety must seem glorious to the hunted. Do you find it so?"

"What have you to say? I am waiting," she answered. "And before you speak, let me tell you that I do not fear for myself. My life has not been so sweet that I am anxious to cling to it."

"Patience, patience! You received my word of Muriel?"

"I received it—yes."

"And believed?"

"I do not know. You tell truth when it serves your purpose."

"I see that you know me. But I am not here to speak of Muriel. There was a conference to-night at Lyndhurst, was there not? Your two managers, and your old Judge, and the fair mistress with the iron hand?"

Pauline was silent.

"I must find out on what day they are going to declare the lockout," pursued the man, with an evil smile. "Heretofore I have been able to se-

cure all the information I desired without your help. This time I could not. So I depend on you. That is not much to ask, is it?"

"No, nor much to tell," she answered. "Mrs. Lackland has discovered that some one in the house has been giving information. She spoke of it only this evening to me, and she has probably now taken all precautions to guard against such news creeping out."

"Yet I must know it. I must know it before to-morrow noon."

"Then you will have to look elsewhere for it."

"I warn you that you are running terrible risks—you are placing those people in greater jeopardy than you are aware."

"Do not be unreasonable," she said wearily. "How can I find this out? Do you think Mrs. Lackland would tell me—or that I would ask?"

"No—but your sweetheart will—the man you love."

Pauline said nothing, but in the moonlight her dark eyes blazed at him.

"You tremble now," he said. "You are afraid for him!"

"No, nor for anything your coward tricks may threaten him with," she answered.

"Ah! Then it is true! My guess is a correct one! He *is* your lover—you *do* love him?"

She had heard no sound, no movement. She was more excited than she was aware—perhaps that accounted for it. So when another voice smote upon her ears she straightened up, stiff, helpless, powerless to move with fright and dismay.

"Pauline!" said some one behind her in stern tones. "What are you doing here, and at this hour?"

A low, frightened moan burst from the girl's lips. The man outside the gate, startled as well as she, and unaware what this interruption might forebode, turned and walked rapidly across the road, being lost to sight a moment later in the undergrowth.

"Pauline! Who is that man! What is Julian Stanhope doing here—like this?"

She clung for support to the iron bars.

"It is not—Julian Stanhope," she said, in a feeble tone.

"Then who may it be? Who is it *you* would

meet in such a way?" He took her arm roughly and his fingers closed like a vice over it. "Speak to me!"

She was striving to collect her thoughts, striving to clear the mists from her brain. She did not feel the clasp upon her arm.

"Oh, I can not tell you! I can not tell you!" she moaned. "What have you heard?"

"Nothing—save the accusation that you have a lover—you have a lover for whom you fear."

"O Gregory, O Gregory, believe in me!"

The pleading, the anguish in her tones touched him to the heart. He knew that were appearances trebly worse against her he would be forced to cling to his faith in her as the truest and best of women.

"Oh, child, God forbid that I should doubt you! But what does it mean? You have been forced to see this—this man! Come, I will know, Pauline. You are not fit to cope with any creature who would compel you to meet him in this way. Trust me, trust me."

"I—can not!" she whispered. "For your own sake, Gregory, I dare not."

"You are in his clutches still—it is that man

Penniston! Oh, my poor little girl, my poor little girl!"

Her limbs failed her. She tottered back against the gate. With great tenderness he drew her close to him and put his arm around her shaking form. She did not resist him.

"You can not help yourself—but I will help you," he said gently. "I will free you from your slavery, Pauline. After all, it is only a slavery of fear. He can not harm you."

"It is only that, I know," she said mechanically. "But I must suffer it. I fear for you, Gregory. They would hurt you, harm you, while I am comparatively safe. Let me go my own way. That is my fate!"

For answer his arm tightened about her. He said no word, and together they entered through the window on the terrace. And she left him fastening it. She dreaded his questioning, though she had nothing to tell him save what he already knew. That Penniston had found her out, had followed her, to resume the persecution and probably the attentions which he had once forced upon her—was that anything to tell? Well had he named it the "slavery of fear." Not so much for herself now,

as she had said, but for those who had befriended her. The man had many unscrupulous allies, and could do much harm without being suspected of complicity in the evil. It was this she dreaded most. She had scanned the servants' faces often and anxiously—wondering what one among them would serve as Penniston's emissary. And tonight, more than ever, the fear of his baneful power was upon her.

As for Gregory, the moment for him had been a revelation. He would not, if he could, have hindered her, when she slipped away from him in the darkness. The great rush of tenderness that had filled his entire being, the words that seemed to tremble involuntarily on his lips, showed him, suddenly, the feelings that had grown up in his heart for his mother's protégée. He grasped the fact that, as if by chance, this girl had entered his life and filled it. What it meant he did not ask. He was satisfied. As of one who meets an unexpected but welcome, well-loved guest, and gives himself up solely to his entertainment.

CHAPTER XII

MARION SIGOGNE LEARNS SOMETHING

EARLY next morning Father Richards—more careworn than ever—appeared at Lyndhurst, and asked for Gregory Lackland. The mistress of the house had not yet appeared, but the priest did not wish to see her, he said, in answer to the servant's question. Gregory and he talked for some time in the library, and then the young man put on his hat and went out with him. Later, when Mrs. Lackland inquired for her eldest son, she was told that he and his visitor had last been seen on the way going into the town.

Pauline, pale and heavy-eyed, for she had slept little, but spent the night in a fever of unrest and turmoil, looked inquiringly at the older woman, who was seated at the breakfast table when she entered.

"You do not seem well, Aunt Laura," she said, kissing her affectionately. "And yet I know that you did not stir all night."

"I slept very heavily," said Mrs. Lackland, "but

my sleep has done me no good. The numb feeling persists. Still, I feel better than I did. I shall spend as much time in the open air as I can to-day."

"It is quite sharp outdoors," said the girl in a listless tone. "We may have snow—it feels as if it would snow."

"Where is Gregory?" asked Bertram, coming in at that moment.

"He went away with Father Richards two hours ago," answered his mother.

"With Father Richards!" echoed the young man. "There must be trouble somewhere. . . . Two hours ago—seven o'clock! Are you sure, mother?"

"So I have been told," said the mother, a trifle wearily. "Do, for goodness' sake, sit down and get the breakfast over. Your coffee, Mr. Sands."

She handed her thin, weazened little secretary the cup as she spoke. He glanced at her, and there was a disagreeable smile on his lips.

"Possibly he has gone out on the same business that took him away at midnight," he said. "And you, also, Miss Faulkner."

Mrs. Lackland raised her eyebrows. She would

not evince any curiosity before Mr. Sands, but she wondered what the remark meant.

"I do not think it was quite midnight, Mr. Sands, was it?" asked the young girl, looking at him unconcernedly enough. "I only know that I was restless and uneasy, and that I thought the fresh air would help me."

"Midnight and after," he said, not looking at her this time, seemingly absorbed in sugaring his coffee.

"I thought you yourself did not reach home until one o'clock, Mr. Sands," said Mrs. Lackland carelessly. "Isn't that what you told me?"

The little man said nothing. There was a faint flicker of the eyelids, and his mouth sharpened a trifle.

"I did not hear Mr. Sands come in at all," said Pauline, then. "Although I heard Gregory and Bertram, and I was awake most of the night. You must have been afraid of disturbing us." She spoke in a careless tone, though her heart was beating quickly.

The little man was nonplussed. He had no answer ready—the girl's unembarrassed statement would have made any further remark uncalled for,

if not impertinent, and in regard to himself he had no wish to say more. Pauline's manner had not been assumed—it was her habit always to be armed for attack, and she knew that Mr. Sands entertained no friendly feelings for her. She did not wish to trouble Mrs. Lackland, who seemed rather odd, she thought, this morning, both in appearance and manner, and she had had neither the time nor the words to tell Gregory what it was that Penniston had demanded. She meant to tell him. She was fully aware that danger threatened, and she looked to Gregory to prevent it. She was very much disturbed at Father Richards' sudden call. Had the evil overtaken them already?

Mrs. Lackland was in her office straightening out some papers when Gregory returned. Her son went to her immediately.

"I am going back again at once," he said to his mother, in a constrained voice, as she glanced up at him interrogatively, and waited for him to speak. "Father Richards thinks it will be well if I am seen about the town to-day. And now—I am here . . ." He swallowed hard a few times, and then threw out his hand with an appealing gesture. "I ask you to forget the hard words that have

passed between us. Forgive me if I have hurt you. I would not do so unless—unless I felt it necessary. Oh, mother, I want your common sense now, your good judgment . . . Let me listen to these men, I beg of you. Let us go back to them now and talk matters over with them. Reinstate Williamson—and Johnson and Philips and Martin, the three discharged with him. You'll lose nothing and gain much—"

Mrs. Lackland put up her hand.

"Do not go any further, Gregory. I decided the factory policy last evening."

"Mother, you are blind! You are mad!"

A smile touched her lips.

"We shall see. These men must be taught a lesson. And now," she looked at him sharply, "where was Pauline last night at midnight? Are you entirely unprejudiced, entirely unbiased, entirely uninterested? Has not Pauline had much to do with these liberal views of yours? Is she not upholding here the views that have been instilled into her so long in the——"

"Mother—please do not bring Pauline into it."

"There is a traitor somewhere in this household. You have told me as much. One who spies

and listens and reports all that may transpire. Last night I feared it might be Pauline, but it did not seem possible that she would thus betray me. To-day I do not know what to think. Where was Pauline at midnight? Where were you?"

He looked at her with honest, frank eyes.

"I went after Pauline," he said, "and brought her home."

"Brought her home!" she exclaimed, aghast, "What folly is this?"

"A folly she committed for our sake," he answered steadily. "Penniston is here. Penniston has been at work among our poor men, and you know what Penniston's lawless views are, and what Penniston has planned to do to revenge himself on you, on us. He owes it to you that Pauline escaped him, and he is still possessed of a mad infatuation for the girl. He is not of the type of man to forget. You know that just as well as I do, and you know now why I am so persistent. When men see those they love in peril they hesitate at no desperate deed. I'm warning you, mother. I need say nothing further."

"I am glad of that."

Gregory looked at her one moment, and that

grave, accusing look only added fuel to her smoldering anger.

"I have pleaded with you, mother, I have argued with you. But it will do no good. And now I am going to say something which you may not like to hear. My father's place is mine, and I stand in my father's stead. I demand some of his authority. You are going to declare a lockout. You shall not do it."

Her glance met his coldly.

"Anything your father did or had or accomplished was through me, through your mother. In asking authority in his name, you ask nothing that belonged to him. Gregory, when I am dead you shall do as you please, but living I can manage my own affairs, and I will."

"That is your last word to me?"

"My last word!" Her voice trembled with passion. "My very last word."

"Well, then, mother, I shall leave Lyndhurst. Better men than I have started out penniless and without advantages. My packing will occupy but a short while—I will go to-morrow."

"As you please," she answered.

"I would go now, at this moment, but that I

must settle affairs at The Pines, and I must try also to get Penniston out of town—”

She held up her hand.

“Wait a moment,” she said, and turned to her desk. “Money will evidently have influence with that man. Here is a signed and certified check. I will not fill it out. Give him any sum you think reasonable and let him go.”

“I would think even the smallest sum unreasonable,” said Gregory in his even, cold tones. “And I had rather you put a limit to the amount. He will have none.”

She passed her hand over her forehead wearily.

“Give him anything he demands, no matter how unreasonable,” she said, “so that we get rid of him. I will not have Pauline harassed and bullied by this creature.”

So generous in all things save one, thought Gregory, as he left the room. In a few moments he was on his way to The Pines. Bertram had already preceded him. Gregory could not wait to see Pauline: he felt that every moment was precious now, and later—well, he had too much to say to wish to leave her when he met her again. Marion was reading when he entered the library. He

wasted no time, but plunged into business immediately, and she tried to follow him, wondering meanwhile at the strangeness of his manner. He closed the books at last.

"You are good to take so much trouble for me when you are in such distress about your mother's affairs," she said gently. "Are the rumors I hear true—that there is disaffection among the men?"

"Yes," said Gregory shortly, "but of course I can not interfere. My mother's business is entirely in her own hands, not in mine. I settled these small details of yours to-day because I shall be too busy to come over again, and I leave Lyndhurst to-morrow."

"You leave Lyndhurst!" she echoed. "I thought your mother had decided to go the early part of next week. Pauline will be fully recovered then."

"I am not going with my mother," he said.

"Not going with your mother?" She gave him a questioning, eager glance. "Then you have decided to take my advice? You intend to seek a larger field?"

"Perhaps," he answered. "But how to find it or where, I do not know. I go," with a smile, "to

seek my fortune. I am not over-fond of fortunes, but I shall have to find one somewhere."

"Oh, Gregory!" Her face was very pale. "At least," she said in a low tone, "you will write to me—you will let me know where you are? Do not," she said pleadingly, and putting her hand on his arm, "do not be hard on that foolish girl you once knew who spoiled her life by an act of utter folly——"

Surely she could say no more! Surely if he ever cared or ever could care, he would speak now! He raised her hand to his lips.

"You will hear from me," he said. "If not directly, at least through Bertram. And if I ever thought hardly of you, Marion, in the past, rest assured that I realize that it was only the impetuosity of youth. Your youth and mine. It was a good thing for both of us. We part the best of friends."

"That is well," she answered, and shook hands with him then as if indeed he had been to her but the friend he declared himself. She needed all her pride, all her vanity, to carry her through the few moments that followed. She dared not give way. She dared not show, by word or sign, that his going mattered, and yet her heart beat in her

breast like a wild thing. She wanted to go after him, to plead with him to remain. But all the rules of convention bound her, and she said nothing. Only stood looking about her with a hunted expression, her eyes dark with pain.

"Wasn't that Gregory?" called Helen, coming into the room. "Where has he gone in such a hurry?"

"I do not know—he did not tell me," said her stepmother slowly. "Is Bertram with you?"

"He has just gone down to the stable—he imagined that one of Soliman's legs was rather stiff when he rode over, and he wanted to look at it. He seems upset, too, mother. There is some trouble at Lyndhurst, isn't there?"

"There must be," said Mrs. Sigogne quietly. "Although I did not ask—I did not like to ask."

"Bertram says that Julian Stanhope asked Pauline to marry him."

"Oh!"

"She refused him completely, and he's gone away," chattered the girl. "I'm sorry, mother—I wish she had taken him. He was really nice, don't you think so?"

"She is very foolish," said Mrs. Sigogne. "He

would have made her a good husband. Mrs. Lackland should have had something to say there. Well," she picked up the papers from the table, "if you want me again, Helen, I shall be in my own room. Bertram will stay to lunch, I presume?"

"I have not asked him yet—but I think so."

With unerring instinct Marion Sigogne seemed to divine the truth. Now she knew why Gregory Lackland was so indifferent to her. He loved Pauline Faulkner! And Pauline, that cold, silent creature, with water in her veins, seemingly, instead of blood—that pale-faced nobody, who came but to bring trouble, that bird of passage, with God only knew what unsavory past—that girl was her successful rival!

For a moment the woman lost all self-control. Hot rage contorted her features, and for a moment her beauty vanished in the anger that consumed her. Why had Laura Lackland ever brought that unfortunate creature to Lyndhurst! She deserved whatever evil happened to her! She could thank her for this. Why had Gregory left London so suddenly, if it was not because he knew that her two years of mourning were up, and that he would see her at The Pines? All might have

been well, save for this stranger, who came from nowhere, who took it upon herself to dictate to others!

She heard laughter downstairs. Helen and Bertram were together, full of life and happiness! Well! Mrs. Lackland would have more trouble with her youngest son than she had bargained for. Matters were going too evenly—it was time she took a hand in the management of things. And she would, she would!

CHAPTER XIII

GREGORY DEALS WITH PENNISTON

AT luncheon Marion Sigogne, if paler than usual, betrayed no emotion out of the common. Still, Helen looked at her several times, a little wonderingly. There was something constrained in her manner to the girl who knew her so well.

"I am seriously thinking of giving up my winter in the city," she said casually, toward the close of the meal.

"Will you stay at The Pines?" asked Helen joyously. "I should like that better than anything else."

"No," said her stepmother, "we will go abroad."

"Abroad!" cried the girl, in consternation. "We came home but a few short months ago. I don't like foreign countries and foreign cooking and foreign living."

"Not even foreign dukes or earls?" laughed her stepmother oddly.

"No, indeed!" cried the girl. "I shall marry an American or no one," and she stole a glance from under her long lashes at Bertram.

"You are entirely too young to think of marriage," said her stepmother severely.

"I shall be eighteen in a very little while," pouted the girl. "And there is not much difference between eighteen and twenty. And you married when you were twenty."

"I will be satisfied if you wait that long, and then marry as well as I did."

"Oh, of course, mother——"

"But I have not met anybody yet who I would willingly allow you to marry. Surely your father never intended your fortune to contribute toward the support of a husband."

Her meaning was obvious, her manner so studied and so cold, that the young people exchanged bewildered glances. Bertram reddened boyishly. He was so surprised at this pointed remark, so astonished at what it implied, that he had no words. Should he declare his intentions?—was this the time? And if Mrs. Sigogne turned on him, and asked him in that icy voice what his prospects were, what was he to say?

"Any man who wins Helen needs no other fortune," he said with dignity. Then he saw that Helen had put her finger to her lips quietly, enjoin-

ing silence. He shrugged his shoulders and bent over his plate. Astonishment was followed by a feeling of injury. What had moved Marion Sigogne to insult him? For it was an insult, and she must mean it as such.

"I must go," he said to Helen in a hurt tone, when he could get a word with her, "and when I come back I shall have something positive to say. Oh, Helen, what a foolish, frivolous boy I have been! But I'm a man now—and—you won't let her come between us?"

"What a question!" said the girl, smiling. "She is just annoyed or put out about something. She will be all right to-morrow. Perhaps she and Gregory have quarreled."

"Whether they have or not," he said, shaking his head soberly, "my eyes have been opened——"

"Helen, my dear! Will you come to me a moment?"

"Yes, mother, directly. Bertram is going."

Marion Sigogne made no answer, nor did she come out to say good-by to the young man. He was more bitterly hurt still at this, for he had always cared a good deal for Mrs. Sigogne. His eyes said much to Helen, but he did not speak—

only wrung her hand silently and went away, while Helen thoughtfully re-entered the house.

Meanwhile, Gregory had proceeded on his errand. He went to the rectory at once, whence he had departed in the foolish hope that he could, at the last moment, win concessions from his mother. It was the noon hour, and little groups of men were scattered about, talking excitedly, but not loudly. They glanced up as Gregory passed among them, and a good many anxious eyes were fastened on his face, for the danger that threatened involved not only the men themselves, but their families and homes. He tried to appear cheerful, and saluted them pleasantly, but as Father Richards opened the door for him himself, too anxious to allow any one else to do it, he made a hopeless gesture.

"I have played my last card, made my last appeal, Father," he said. "Have you seen Penniston?"

"He is known as Franklin—Bart Franklin here. It is he who has fomented this thing, and I fear—What do you mean to do with him? Pauline——"

"No harm shall come to Pauline, Father," said the young man. And then in a voice of emotion which he could not control: "Save over my dead

body. Every hair of her head is precious to me."

"Thank God!" said the priest. "She is a good girl—a tender-hearted woman. I am glad you care for her—very glad. But about this—this Franklin, or Penniston, or whatever his name is——"

"I am going to try to buy him off. His whole work here has been done through revenge. Now we'll see if money can help matters."

"You have your mother's consent?"

"Yes. I have told her. You say you saw him?"

"I saw him. He was very ugly, but he promised to come here at dusk. He said he did not want the men to see him. I told him that one would be here to meet him who would have something of interest to say. This is a terrible time, Gregory!"

"I know it, Father. There is no telling what may happen. I suppose we should appeal for troops to protect us—God only knows what dangerous deed the men may have in view. But I can't do that, and my mother has evidently not thought of it——"

"My dear boy, rest assured that her advisers have done so. They are giving the soldiers time to get here before declaring the lockout."

"Oh, Father Richards, no! My mother would not do anything like that!"

"She is a headstrong woman, in the hands of evil counselors."

"Father! I shall never know a quiet moment if anything happens. You know how one careless word will stir up strife—and the soldiers must protect themselves! Oh, she is indeed being ill-counseled."

The priest was in sore distress himself, but he could not help pitying this young fellow, who sat now with his head in his hands.

"We will pray!" he said softly. "Our Lord may change her—or at least He will take care of my poor people. As for you—you have done what you could—you have left no stone unturned. You are helpless. Do not, therefore, take this thing too much to heart. Affairs can not go on like this forever."

They spent the next hour talking quietly. About three o'clock Father Richards was sent for on a pressing sick-call, and Gregory was left alone. He tried to read, but his mind was full of hideous thoughts that tormented him. He feared all sorts of evils, of dangers to his mother, to Pauline. Oh,

if he could but rid this poor girl of that horrible creature, that man who was draining the very life-blood of energy and hope from her veins!

It was growing dark when he heard the priest's old housekeeper talking to some one in the front hall.

"You can come inside and wait for him," she was saying. "He's been gone a while, so that he can't be much longer away." And then she came in to Gregory. "There's a man here—Father Richards said I should bring him in—that you'd attend to him. So will you come out here and see if it's the right one? I don't like to see strangers pokin' around, an' this man is a stranger to me."

Gregory went out into the hall, and glanced into the small waiting-room. The stranger was standing impatiently just inside the door.

"Will you come with me, sir?" he said politely, and the man followed him into the priest's library. Gregory turned on the switch, and the room was flooded with electric light.

"May I trouble you to pull down the shades?" asked the stranger in low, drawling, musical tones.

Gregory obeyed. There seemed to be something so familiar about this man, about his carriage, even

his peculiar way of talking. He knew what it was when he faced him again a moment later. He was a fair man, of a pronounced blond type, with peculiar, steel-blue eyes. Not prepossessing, rather crafty-looking. And yet he reminded Gregory of Julian Stanhope. He no longer wondered why Pauline disliked the man who had come to woo her—it was because she had felt this odd resemblance without guessing at it.

“We have had the pleasure of meeting before,” said Gregory slowly. “And not so many hours ago. Whom have I the honor of addressing—Mr. Bart Franklin or Mr. Wilfrid Penniston?”

“Whichever one you wish to have dealings with,” drawled the other, watching him keenly. “Our good friend, the priest, scarcely prepared me for this—honor. He did not mention who it was wanted to see me so particularly.”

“Oh! You imagined, perhaps, it was the girl whom you tried to frighten and to browbeat? She will never meet you again, I trust. I shall take care of all that for her in the future.”

“Oh! I see! May I congratulate you?”

“Just a moment, please—we have little time to waste in words. I am here with a fair business

proposition to you. I want you to take the very next train for the city—it leaves in one hour and ten minutes. But before doing so I have an interesting little document which you are to sign.”

He pushed a sheet of paper across the table as he spoke. The man picked it up quickly and read, and then threw it down with an oath.

“Sign that! You are crazy to ask me to do such a thing!”

“Before going further I would like you to notice that little door over there in the corner. It leads into the priest’s dining-room.”

“I see it,” surlily.

“Will you oblige me, and satisfy yourself, by opening it?”

With a curious glance, the man arose, crossed to the door, opened it and looked into the dining-room. Two men were seated at the table, smoking. They glanced up as Penniston surveyed them, but took no further notice of him. He closed the door and went back to the sofa.

“Those men are two detectives with a warrant for your arrest,” said Gregory Lackland evenly. “They are waiting for me to call them. Wait—don’t try to get away. I’m just as strong as you

are, stronger, I think, and nothing would suit me better than a little provocation on your part. I should dearly love to thrash you within an inch of your life, you—*you cur!*”

The young man's brown eyes were blazing, his face working. All the pent-up passion and righteous anger seething in his heart found vent in the words hurled at the cool and critical man opposite him, who had half-risen, but now sank back again.

“You'll meet your just deserts without interference of mine,” went on Gregory. “And I can bide my time. I don't want to be bothered with you—I want to get rid of you. I want you out of the way. Men like you have your price. Name it.”

“Name my price!” drawled the other man slowly. “My price for leaving your precious factory hands to work out their own salvation? It will serve you very little, brother. And I am to sign that paper, which states that I have tried to incite,” he picked it up and read slowly, “‘by inflammatory speeches and outrageous schemes, the people of the West Shore and East Shore factories to deeds of violence. And that I hereby swear to leave the vicinity of—————now and forever in

consideration of the sum of——.’” He glanced up. “You have not mentioned the sum.”

“No, I have not. Before giving you any amount, I want some proof that you will act in good faith. I want to know the plans of the men. I want to know what they contemplate doing.”

“Without me—nothing.”

“Ah, that is good! But with you . . .”

The man leaned back on the sofa and put his hands in his pockets.

“What do *you* intend to do with Pauline?”

“Marry her,” said Gregory coldly. “But that is none of your business.”

“No—that is none of my business.” He waited a moment, his eyes bent on the floor. “You are sure of that—you are sure she will marry you?”

“I am sure of it,” said Gregory imperturbably. “She is done with the old life forever. Her father thrust her aside when she was no longer of any use to him. She can not help her sister. She stands alone—but not altogether alone while I live.”

“You may not live as long as you think,” said the other moodily.

“None of us has a lease of life—your own death

may be close at hand," answered Gregory very coldly. "If I die I shall leave her in good hands; while I live I am able to protect her."

A mocking smile played about the man's thin lips.

"My price," he said, "is \$25,000."

Gregory did not move a muscle. He drew the paper toward him and filled in the empty space. Then he held up his hand.

"One moment," he said, "we must have witnesses. But before you sign you have surely something else to tell me."

"Yes," he said. "It has been decided that your mother dies to-night. If not your mother, either one of her sons."

"My mother! Or one of her sons! I thought as much! And who is to perform such a heroic deed?"

"It is not yet known. They are to choose at this evening's meeting."

"Which you will not attend. You must regret having to miss it. However, I am thankful for the information—I need know nothing further. Mr. Hayes, Mr. Durson," he called, then throwing open the door, "will you come here, please?"

The men stood while Penniston affixed his name

—"Wilfrid Penniston" and under it "Bart Franklin." Then the two officers wrote out their signatures, and at a word from Gregory went back to the dining-room. Gregory picked up the check lying face downward on the table and filled it in.

"You will stay here until you have just enough time left to get to the station," he said. "Our friends outside will escort you there and see you safely aboard your train. After which they have other work to do. They mean to attend that meeting of which you spoke, and perhaps the men will be persuaded that there is something to be said on the side of law and order."

Gregory folded the signed and witnessed document carefully, and put it in his pocket. Penniston said nothing, only sat staring at the check in his hand. The two men came in from the dining-room and took their places near him. Gregory turned to them.

"You can get to the station in a half-hour—the train is due at ten minutes past."

"Yes, sir," said the man called Hayes. "We understand."

"I am going back to Lyndhurst. You know how to reach me—later."

They nodded, and Gregory left the room.

CHAPTER XIV

A SHOT IN THE DARK

GREGORY was not surprised to meet Bertram as he struck the outskirts of the town. He knew his brother, who was much attached to him, would be alarmed at his disappearance for so many hours. He wondered a little, however, to see him on foot, for Bertram was averse to walking when he could ride, and his favorite method of transportation was Soliman's back. Neither brother cared for the handsome motor Mrs. Lackland had bought some months previous for Pauline's use as well as her own, and which had seen very little service. It was a beautiful night, the moon just rising behind the hills, and the air, while cold, was still. They did not speak after the first word of greeting, but walked side by side for a long time in silence.

"What is the matter?" asked Gregory at last. "Or are you downhearted because my own spirits are at zero?"

"No," said Bertram. "Pauline was restless about you, and I myself have been hurt and in-

sulted to-day, so that I could not wait to get you home to tell you of it. You must advise me what is best to be done." He related the incident of that morning without preamble.

"See what a position I am placed in—and it is my mother's fault!" he said bitterly. "All her fault! I was afraid——"

"Be careful, Bertram. If anything happened to her you could not bear to think that you had ever said one word of blame."

The gravity of his manner impressed Bertram.

"You speak as if something could happen," he said.

"Not now, with God's help," said Gregory reverently. And then, very quietly, he told his brother the item of news he had learned.

"As a precaution we will make mother change her room to-night, and Pauline, too," said the young man. "And we must be prepared for a long vigil. Hayes and Durson will come along later, and we'll learn just how matters stand."

Bertram was so astonished at this news that he had almost forgotten his grievance. Now he began to talk impressively of their future, and he talked so well, and with such sound common sense,

that Gregory felt he had misjudged him. Here was no idle dreamer, but a youth ready for all the duties of manhood. They talked that night as they had never done before, and for the first time in their lives the two brothers understood each other thoroughly. But although Bertram unfolded all his plans with the enthusiasm of youth, Gregory said nothing. If a thought of his own future crossed his mind when his brother spoke, he dismissed it. On the morrow he was to leave Lyndhurst—perhaps forever. His pride and his common sense waged war within him. He had said he would go, and his mother did not seem to want to keep him. Well, he had found the ringleader, and banished him. To-morrow, before he left, he would tell her all, and show her the brief confession signed by Wilfrid Penniston. Then, if she wished, she could take matters into her own hands.

They had reached Lyndhurst. Bertram passed through the gates and Gregory followed. As the gate swung open, the older brother stooped to tie his shoe, the lacing of which had become unfastened. He had no sooner bent over than there was a flash and the noise of a gun-shot from the opposite thicket. The night was so quiet that the

sound carried far and seemed dreadfully loud. Gregory had saved his life by bending his head. Bertram stood petrified.

"Gregory! Gregory!" he stammered then. "Are you hurt?"

Gregory said nothing. He drew him well inside the big bushes before he spoke, and then it was in a whisper.

"No, the shot didn't reach me. Run up to the house—quickly, or they will fear that something has happened."

"And you?"

"I have a revolver here. I'm going to find out who that was. Don't wait, Bertram; you go ahead."

"Gregory, I daren't leave you like this. Mother would never forgive me."

"We are wasting valuable time. Go, go, I tell you."

Mrs. Lackland was seated in the drawing-room with Pauline. She had been very quiet all day, with an anxious, strained expression on her face. Pauline had been disturbed by Gregory's protracted absence, and it was because of this anxiety that she had asked Bertram to try to meet his brother. At the sound of the shot, which seemed just outside

the window, the night was so still, the book dropped from Pauline's fingers. The mother dozing in an arm-chair near by, sat up with a startled, horrified look on her pale face.

"What was that, what was that?" she gasped.

Pauline's lips quivered. She could not speak.

"It was a shot—I heard it plainly . . ."

Then came the sound of feet running hastily up the terrace steps. Mrs. Lackland tried to rise, but could not. She began gasping for breath, and Pauline, alarmed at the frightful pallor of her face, sprang to her side. The next moment Bertram darted into the room.

"It is all right, mother—he has not been hurt."

"Who—has—not been—hurt? Where is Gregory?"

"Coming, dearest mother. Calm yourself."

"They shot at him—they shot at my boy! O God, God pity me!"

Pauline bent over her, putting her arm about the older woman's shoulders. Half-crazed, Laura Lackland looked up into that young white face.

"I have you to thank—only you! This is Peniston's work, I know it, I feel it. You have drawn

him here, you whom I sought to protect, to shelter. And through you I lose my boy!"

"Aunt Laura!"

"No, no, no!" cried Bertram, in a panic of excitement. "Gregory is all right, mother, I assure you. On my word of honor, mother! The shot was fired as we entered the gate, and he made me hurry here, so that you would not be alarmed. Do not take it so—he is safe, and he knows what he is doing."

The mother looked at the stricken girl before her. Her lips moved faintly, and when she did speak, it was in a hoarse voice:

"Go away! Go away! You but torment me the more! I can not bear the sight of you!"

"Mother!" cried Bertram. "She is distraught, Pauline——"

But the girl moved slowly toward the door, her fair head bowed, her frail limbs staggering under the weight of her body. With her hand upon the knob she turned.

"If Gregory is safe, why is he not here?" she whispered.

"Yes! If Gregory is safe, why did he not come in with you? Bertram, you are deceiving me."

"No, mother, I am not," he answered. "I am not deceiving you."

Pauline opened the door and went out. Mrs. Lackland, too weak to move, to rise from her chair, lay back, moaning and sobbing, all self-control gone. To Bertram, unable to do more for her, undetermined what course to pursue—whether to leave his brother to seek his would-be murderer alone, or to rouse the servants and lead them in search of him, paced up and down the floor, running his fingers through his hair in a fever of unrest. Not a sound was heard, no other shot was fired. Ten minutes passed in this way, twenty, the half-hour. At last the quick, sharp step they knew so well sounded outside, and the next moment Gregory entered the room.

His mother's eyes met his in silence. She could not speak.

"Were you worried, mother? I could not help it. Something told me that I should be able to do a good bit of work out there in the woods, and I succeeded. Why, mother, what is the matter? Were you very much disturbed?"

He leaned over her chair, and she passed her hands over his arms, his shoulders, his face, his

hair, in an outburst of tenderness. He clasped her close to him and kissed her affectionately.

"O Gregory, my son, my son, my son!" She was sobbing on his breast.

"Hush, mother, hush, dear mother. It is a good night for us."

Gradually her sobs ceased.

"Oh, that miserable girl must go away! She has cost me nothing but trouble and unrest since she came!"

"What is this?" cried Gregory. "Where is Pauline?" With his arms about his mother he turned to Bertram. "Where is she, where is she?"

"I do not know," said Bertram. "She went out a half-hour ago."

"Out! Out in the grounds? Why?"

Bertram did not answer.

"It was Penniston who tried to shoot you?" asked his mother, trembling.

"No," said Gregory. "I have disposed of Penniston."

"Do you know who it was?"

"Yes—I found him."

"Found him!" cried the mother and Bertram together. "And—where is he?"

"I let him go," the young man answered quietly. "He has been driven almost wild by evil counsel. He is one of our own men, mother. I sent him home to his wife and family in a better frame of mind, I hope."

"This is pure folly—"

"I must see Pauline," interrupted the young man quickly. "Find out for me if she is in her room, Bertram. Tell her I must see her at once."

"I am sure she went out, Gregory," said the brother, "but I will go upstairs."

"Why should you want to see Pauline?" asked the mother tempestuously. "What is Pauline to you?"

"Nothing—nothing yet," he answered gravely. "But, oh, very much in the future, I hope. I mean to marry her if she will have me."

"If she will have—" Mrs. Lackland laughed—a low, mirthless laugh. "Ah! I see it all! Now I understand her—and you!"

The young man said nothing. He heard Bertram's step on the stairs. He went out to him.

"She is not in the house, Gregory."

Gregory turned on his heel and left the hall. His keen eyes searched the terrace. He went down the

steps, still searching, and along the path, but Pauline was not visible. Anxious now, he was going back again, when a blotch of white at the foot of an old oak-tree a little off the road attracted him. He went toward it. It was Pauline, seated on the ground, her arms across her knees, her face hidden.

"My darling! My darling!" he whispered passionately, bending over her. "Come, this is no place for you. You will be ill, and oh, I need your strength, your counsel, my own dear girl, now, if never before."

She raised her white face.

"Is it you, Gregory? O Gregory, my heart is broken!"

"No, sweetheart, no! It is my heart now—not yours, and I shall take good care of it."

"You are safe! They have not injured you?"

"They have helped me. Come, dear, this is no place for you."

"I know it," she said. "I know it. Gregory, if you have ever liked me, if you have ever respected me, do something for me now."

"Yes, dearest—anything."

"Go inside that house and get my cloak—the

long, dark one; it is close at hand, for I had it on this afternoon. And the black scarf that I wear. Bring them to me."

"Why—you mean—"

"I am an outcast. I can not go back. I can not sleep another night in Lyndhurst."

"My mother—"

"Oh, she is right, right! I am a miserable, unhappy girl. I should have gone long, long ago—but no, I stayed! I would not be counseled by my own wisdom. Gregory, it is all over. There is nothing left, nothing. Even Aunt Laura turns against me, reproaching me. And she is right, that is the worst of all. I have brought this misery on those I love—"

She broke into piteous sobs. He put his arms around her and drew her within their shelter.

"You are mine," he said solemnly. "I love you, Pauline. My mother was beside herself with fear. She can not be held accountable. Are you so hard, so unforgiving as to credit her with a knowledge of what she was saying? Come, my brave girl, come. We will go to her together. I will tell her what you are to me—"

"Gregory," she murmured, "I dare not—I dare

not care for you. I dare not let you care for me. I am fated. God does not want me to be happy—”

“That is blasphemy,” he said. “God is trying you sorely, but He wants you to be happy in His own time and His own way. Let us leave our future in His hands, my dear girl, and attend to more pressing matters. You can not stay out here—you are chilled and shivering. You can not leave Lyndhurst alone, unprotected. When you go, I go with you. Would you force me to desert my mother in her sorest need? Yet that is how much I love you, Pauline!”

She tottered, holding to him for support, but his tender arms were about her, and she did not draw back when he led her gently in the direction of the house. At the foot of the terrace steps he paused.

“You love me, Pauline? You have not said it yet, sweetheart.”

She lifted her drawn face to his, and her eyes were shining through her tears.

“I love you, Gregory.”

They went into the house. Pauline released herself and went upstairs immediately. Gregory sought his mother. She was still in the armchair,

Bertram in another, close in the shadow of the window. Gregory did not see him.

"You found Pauline, Gregory?"

"Yes, I found her, mother. And I have told her that I loved her. Will you welcome this girl as your future daughter?"

"No," was the uncompromising answer, "I will not. And if you marry her it will be without my consent."

She was again the harsh woman of the early morning, her momentary weakness and tenderness forgotten, evidently. But Gregory could not forget. A great thankfulness was in his heart. His impulse was to get away by himself, where he could thank God, who had preserved his life, who had put the solution of their great difficulty into his hand, and who had given him the woman of his heart—the woman who was so dear to him. A sad expression stole into his face as he looked down at his mother. His eyes met hers, not angrily, but as if he were mutely pleading for one touch of sympathy.

"No shadow must rest on the name of the girl who will be your wife," said the mother evenly. "If you had chosen wisely, Gregory, Marion Sigogne—"

"Mother, if you please—we will not go into that," he said, in low tones. "Marion Sigogne taught me a bitter lesson some years ago. She caused me many miserable hours. She almost wrecked my belief in the honesty of a woman's word, my faith in her promise. But, thanks be to God, I had a good mother. I could not unlearn the lessons that mother had taught me, and I was saved. Since then," his voice seemed tired and weary, "I felt like a man who has been sorely wounded. The hurt had healed, but I was afraid of it. Until I saw her again, and then I knew that not even the scar remained. Do not compare Pauline, the soul of truth, upright, honest, and pure, with Marion Sigogne, who sold herself for an old man's money."

And so, still with that expression of sadness on his face, he let his hand rest lightly on hers for a moment, and left the room. He did not stoop to kiss her, as was his habit, but the touch was a caress in itself. Bertram knew that he had not observed him, and he shrank back into the shadows. He would not have Gregory imagine that he had seen or heard any of that revelation of the deepest feelings of his heart.

CHAPTER XV

PAULINE'S DETERMINATION

To her first impulse of despair, when Pauline left the shelter of that home in which had been found the only peace she had ever known, had succeeded a dull horror of the fate in store for her. Penniless and friendless, the girl stood looking into what seemed a very sea of desolation.

"Oh, dear Lord," she prayed, as she fell prostrate at the foot of the great oak tree, "take me to Thyself. I can bear no more. Or if it be Thy holy will that I live on, save me from peril, preserve me from the hands of my enemies."

Sobbing heart-brokenly, she had not heard Gregory's approach, and when she lifted her strained white face to his and the voice of her soul found vent in those pitiful words, "Oh, Gregory, my heart is broken!" she felt that, no matter where she turned, there was no relief, no hope for her. In all her troubled and perilous life she had never known such bitter anguish.

Gregory's declaration, while it comforted her, did

not fill her with the joy that the same words would have caused at another and more propitious time. It was sweet to feel that some one cared, that some one understood, but her mind, projected into the future, saw the impossibility of their mutual affection. The woman who had ordered her away that night would never agree to this marriage. Gregory might win her consent by persuasion or defiance, but Pauline was too true, too straightforward, to enter a family under such conditions. And again her common sense came to her aid. She must, indeed, return to the house. She could not wander out into the world without making some provision for immediate needs. She had a few little treasures to gather together, a few trinkets that had been her mother's, and that she could probably convert into money to serve her until she found a way of supporting herself. She moved about the pretty room which Mrs. Lackland had made so bright and charming for the unhappy young stranger. She took out her little brown handbag and opened it—it would contain everything necessary for the present.

She had no ambitions left, no hope. She went around the room slowly, picking out from among

the many gifts bestowed upon her the few things that were her own. She was tired to the point of complete exhaustion. She heard Mrs. Lackland's heavy step on the stairs, heard her enter her own room. At another time she would have called out to her—but not now. She shrank a little from meeting her, from talking to her. She felt that she could never seek the interview.

But Gregory's mother sought it. She opened the door between them and came in with that unusual, slow step, her face very pale. There were lines of pain between her eyebrows. Pauline turned as she entered, meekly indeed, for so proud a nature, waiting. And Mrs. Lackland said nothing, only stared at her with inscrutable eyes.

"You will forgive me for coming back, Aunt Laura," said the girl. "But I—I could not help it. I will go—I am going—as soon——"

The words died on her lips. Gregory's mother sat down heavily in a chair.

"I want to talk to you," she said in her slow, heavy voice. "Pauline, you and I must come to an understanding."

"Yes," whispered the girl.

"Before we go any further, before we say any-

thing else, one thing must be understood. You can not marry Gregory."

The girl bowed her head.

"I know that," she answered. "Oh, I know that very well, Aunt Laura."

A gleam of satisfaction shot across the older woman's face.

"Ah! You are sensible. Do you love him?"

Lower and lower sank the fair golden head.

"My girl, I want an answer."

"I do not intend to marry him, Aunt Laura. That ought to satisfy you."

"So! Then you *do* love him! That is why you rejected Julian Stanhope!"

"No," said Pauline, shuddering, "that is not the reason. I could not bear Julian Stanhope, Aunt Laura—I did not refuse him because of Gregory—I did not know I cared for Gregory until to-night, to-night, when I heard that shot. . . . Then I knew, Aunt Laura, then I knew."

Mrs. Lackland waved her words aside.

"If things had gone well I expected to see Gregory and Marion Sigogne man and wife. That has been my desire always. They were sweethearts in their youth, but something came between them—

and now you have managed to part them more effectually."

The poor girl wrung her hands together.

"Not intentionally," she said, "oh, not intentionally. Please hold me guiltless of meaning to do any harm——"

"I can not. It is all your fault. You brought discontent among the men at first. Penniston followed you here, and fomented rebellion. My industry—the pride of my dear husband's life and mine—is in peril. My son's life is threatened—is endangered. Through you! through you! It would be a fitting crown to all this if he did indeed marry you!"

"Aunt Laura! You are cruel! you are heartless! Was it my fault that I came here first? Did I not warn you? Did I not tell you all? Did you not hear my story from beginning to end and Penniston's part in it? And, Aunt Laura," her voice quivered, "did you not say that all would be forgotten? No, no! Listen now! And when I came here you bade me interest myself in work that pleased me, and from the lips of those who suffered, those to whom you would not listen, I heard the story of the meanness and cupidity of the two

men you trusted rather than your own sons. If I tried to open your eyes . . . was that breeding discontent? If Penniston followed me here—did you not suspect he would? Oh, Aunt Laura, blame me if you must, but not unjustly.”

Mrs. Lackland was silent. Every word the girl spoke was true. She had befriended her, and then when the friendship entailed the very consequences she had foreseen, she turned on her and would cast her off. For a moment the woman's natural sense of justice and openness, her honesty, struggled with her cold anger. Struggled and lost.

“What do you mean to do?” she asked after a moment.

“I am going away, of course.”

“Where?”

“I do not know. I mean to disappear from your life as I entered into it—as I have always known I would disappear. Neither you nor yours will ever be troubled by me again——”

“And Gregory——”

“Gregory least of all.”

“If you assure me of that—if you, Pauline Faulkner, promise me that Gregory will never

learn your whereabouts, I will help you—I will provide you a refuge and means to remain in it.”

The girl's bosom heaved, her eyes flashed, her nostrils dilated. She flung her fair head high in air, and the old proud spirit, which could never be tamed, spoke in every lineament of her countenance.

“Aunt Laura, though I knew when I left your door that the next day's sun would find me penniless and starving, I would take no further help from you. You have done enough for me, and I am grateful. I take it as you gave it. Freely, generously, you held out your hand to me, and I would not be outdone in my acceptance of your bounty. But now! Ah, now is a different matter. I am young, strong, healthy. I will make my own way.”

“So be it,” said the woman proudly, unforgivingly. “I at least feel that I have done my duty.”

That was her last word to Pauline. She went back into her own room again, and the girl threw herself upon her pillows, quivering with shame and mortification. She had bent meekly enough, for her, under the terrible strain of that awful day, but this last scene sent the blood in hot, bounding

gushes through her entire frame. Oh, if she could go out that very hour, that very moment! But fear of the man who was her evil shadow was stronger than shame at the mother's words. It would not be right to risk what she might have to face, at midnight, with the gates of Lyndhurst closed behind her forever. Prudence and sense and prayer helped her to control the fierce resentment that seemed urging her to rash and desperate deeds.

She prayed indeed. Every struggling breath was a prayer, every stifled sigh an invocation. No tears came—tears were far from her dry and burning eyes. With hidden face she lay there, her arms above her head. How long she did not know, for she had no thought of time.

Suddenly she heard an unwonted noise in the hall below, the hurried steps of men and women, the quick, rapid speech of alarm. She rose to a sitting posture, listening, and as she did so she noticed that the sky outside her window was red. She sprang to her feet quickly and pulled away the curtains. One of the outbuildings was ablaze, whether the barn or the new garage which had just been finished she could not tell. The excited cries

of the servants came up to her. She heard Gregory's low tones, and knew he was on the terrace . . . that he was going out! Her heart sank within her. She turned toward the door, rushed swiftly down the steps and along the hall, passing the servants in her rapid flight, and out to the terrace. Gregory was just in front of her. She dashed down the steps and grasped his arm.

"Gregory, Gregory, do not go—it may be a trick!" She clung to him. "Oh, Gregory, let the others . . . "

"Sweetheart, I am in no danger. I do not think it has been set on fire—I do not think it is the work of the men——"

"Penniston!" she whispered.

"Is far out of town by now, dear. I shall tell you about it to-morrow— Who is that?" he broke out then, as a form loomed up in front of him. "What, you, Hayes? Where is Durson?"

"He turned off with the men to the fire, sir. I thought I had better try to reach you first."

"That is right. Have you seen our friend to safety?"

"Oh, yes, sir, hours ago."

"Good, good! Pauline, my dear child, go into

the house and wait for me—I will tell you all when I come back. Go, dear. There is no one with my mother if she wakes, and this blaze will frighten her. Bertram is ahead with the others.”

“Please do not be very long,” whispered the girl. He pressed her hand tenderly, and she turned back, while he and Hayes kept on to where the red flames were showing above the trees.

“We got him out of the way safely, sir,” said Hayes, knowing that this matter was uppermost in Gregory’s mind. “The express, too, as you arranged, and he couldn’t get off that in time to reach town again and do any mischief before we had *our* little say. Then we went to the meeting. They didn’t give us a very warm reception,” he said, “until I—Durson wanted me to do the talking—began telling them that Bart Franklin had sold them out. We needed our revolvers for the next few minutes,” with an ironical smile. “I didn’t stop at anything, sir. I told them just who he was, and why he came here—to revenge himself on Mrs. Lackland for a private motive, which it wouldn’t do any good to state. I guess they’re no fools. They began to put two and two together, and I had ’em pretty well on my side, when a fellow

came in—the one that tried to settle you this evening.”

“I know,” said Gregory with satisfaction.

“Say, he tried to tell the whole thing, but he broke down and cried like a baby. Told ’em just what you had said, and that you were going to do all you possibly could for them, but that they must be patient, even if things did look queer for a while. He got those fellows round his finger in a jiffy. They’d do anything for you or Miss Pauline. That wasn’t a planned affair—that shot at you. It was the fellow’s own mad impulse. And everything is declared off—for a while, anyhow. They don’t mean to do anything yet.”

“I knew it, I knew it!” said Gregory under his breath. “Oh, if I could get the reins of power in my hands just for one month! Just one month! I’d give ten years of my life for it!”

They were nearing the scene of the blaze. Bertram and Durson joined them.

“It is the barn,” said Bertram. “We can’t save it, though the men have the water turned on. They are keeping a stream or two on the garage.”

“The horses are safe?”

“Yes—they reached there in time. They had

a little trouble with Pauline's pony—it nearly went crazy. But nothing happened.”

“Do they know how it started?”

“No idea—looks as if some one were careless. Doesn't seem intentional, anyhow.”

The brothers stood watching the burning building. The entire barn was in flames—it was useless to try to save it. There was very little breeze—a fortunate thing—and a steady stream of water pouring on the garage successfully eliminated the fear of any further danger.

“I don't think we are needed here,” said Gregory. “You had better go back to the house, Bertram. If you don't, mother will come down to find out for herself what the trouble is. It is pretty late, Mr. Hayes—you and Durson must put up with us for the night. If you are tired, come back now. Our men will see to everything.”

“I forgot to tell you,” said Hayes quietly, “that your mother has one man here she'd better get rid of. His name is Sands.”

“Sands! Why, he's her secretary!”

“Well, I don't know how much he's made out of it—but he and Bart Franklin have been pretty thick. I believe they had some misunderstand-

ing a few days ago—had a fine quarrel, and Sands applied for some hours' absence just when he knew he would be most necessary to the other side."

"I remember. My mother was very much annoyed at his asking it at that time. So—that is the chap! Got any proofs, Hayes?"

"Only what the men told me, and they couldn't say much definite. I caught the name, though——"

"Gregory! Bertram! Are you there?"

The brothers turned at the panting call. It was Pauline, breathless.

"Get Soliman and ride as fast as you can for the doctor and Father Richards. Aunt Laura has gone off into a swoon from which none of us can rouse her, and I'm afraid it's dangerous. Hurry, hurry, Bertram!"

CHAPTER XVI

MRS. LACKLAND IS STRICKEN

LAURA LACKLAND never felt so bitter toward any one as she did toward Pauline when she left her with the words, "At least I have tried to do my duty." She was a really noble-minded woman, who seldom failed to temper justice with mercy. But in some things she was implacable. She resented the entire sentiment of her household now. She knew that she was acting in an unfair manner to both her sons, but love of power had her in its grasp, and she was struggling with her conscience. She tried to blame any one, anything but herself, and the only one near at hand to blame was Pauline. Upon Pauline, then, fell all the burning anger which she was too proud and cold to display, but which seethed in her heart. The girl's words had not helped to placate her any, their worst sting being in their truth. She had no room for softer feelings as she went back into her apartment and prepared to retire. She had never been ill in her life, but the last few days had completely

unnerved her. She thought, in a tired fashion, that she would not worry any longer—at least not until the morrow. She could not kneel, but sat beside her bed, saying a few prayers mechanically—and as she prayed a sudden revulsion of feeling seemed to creep over her. After all, she was right—poor Pauline was right . . . And Gregory . . .

But she could—she would—think no further. She made the sign of the cross in the same mechanical fashion, and then lay down. Her eyes closed immediately. A feeling of absolute rest swept over her. Yes, she was tired. To-morrow she would settle everything, to-morrow she would see.

And so she fell asleep. And slept during the long hours when the unhappy girl in the next room lay face down in her pillows, covered with shame, filled with anguish. Slept soundly, as one exhausted sleeps, through the first hurrying noise, the rushing footsteps, the calls of alarm. Slept while Pauline, thinking of nothing or no one but the man she loved, raced from the room and out into the night to warn and implore.

But Pauline had not been gone a moment when the sudden cessation of all noise, perhaps, aroused the mother. She looked about her dazedly. Her

bed faced the window, and through the curtains she saw the leaping tongues of flame that spoke of near disaster. Fear lent her strength. She pulled aside the curtains and stared out into the night. She could grasp nothing, save that harm threatened, that it was close at hand.

"Gregory! Gregory!" she cried. "Oh, Gregory, where are you?"

All grew dark before her eyes. She clutched at the curtains with a wild fear that her son was in danger once more. She tried to steady herself, and held on to the heavy drapery with both shaking hands.

"Gregory! Gregory! Pauline! Pauline, come to me, come to me!"

Pauline, coming up the stairs at that moment, heard. The low, choking tones pierced the terrible silence that had fallen over the house. With swift feet the young girl ran into the room, her face ashen, her gray eyes black, dilated. She put her arms about the older woman.

"I am dying, Pauline!" she whispered. "I am dying! Forgive! Forgive!"

"Oh, Aunt Laura—oh, Aunt Laura, my dearest, my best friend!" whispered the girl in accents of

utter tenderness. They pierced through the failing senses. The woman opened her eyes again, looking at her so imploringly, so piteously, that the hot tears gushed into Pauline's eyes. Then the form grew heavy in her arms. She could not support that dead weight, but she sank with it to the floor, and pulled a cushion toward her from one of the chairs. The gray pallor of Mrs. Lackland's face alarmed her. She put her hand to her heart. It was beating.

"Thank God!" she whispered aloud. She found a servant on one of the lower floors and sent her upstairs to stay with Mrs. Lackland until she returned, and then went to Gregory. Bertram waited to hear no particulars, and Gregory turned back to the house at once after her terrified announcement. To Pauline every event of that night seemed to be burning into her brain with a force that no subsequent lapse of time could ever efface. The last flickering blaze of the big barn and its heap of red embers; the grotesque effects of the play of flame on the faces of the men—and then the sudden onslaught of questions from Gregory, as he broke into a run beside her, with swift apology to Hayes, left far behind, and over all the

quick, pounding beat of Soliman's hoofs as Bertram tore away on his vital errand.

Mrs. Lackland lay as Pauline had left her, and Gregory and the girl lifted her into bed and covered her. She was still unconscious, but heart and pulse beat in a labored, struggling fashion. At first Pauline tried to revive her, bathing her temples and making Gregory chafe her hands, but all the simple remedies failed, and they were forced to desist. A terrible weight seemed to rest on Gregory's heart as he stood looking down at his mother's face, gray and ashy, with a strange shadow on it.

"It doesn't seem like an ordinary faint, does it, Pauline?" he asked.

"It isn't," she answered gently. "My own mother used to slip off into fainting spells—and they were not like this. It may be—you see, the excitement——"

"Pauline! She is not dying! You do not think she is dying?"

"No, no. Bertram can not be long, now——"

"God forgive me!" said Gregory with a groan. "I felt that I would give the world, if I possessed it, to hold the Lackland Mills in my power. I

prayed that God would show me some way to accomplish my desire. Pauline, Pauline, if anything happened to her I would never forgive myself, never."

"Hush, hush!" said Pauline. "You are unnerved, unstrung. Do not think such things. it is wrong."

She was back again in the place she had filled—the planner, the consoler, the head. She slipped into a position of authority as by right. She had been her mother's only stay, only hope for years—Pauline, rather than Muriel the elder, who had been ever somewhat heedless and thoughtless.

It was an hour and a half before Bertram arrived with the doctor. Father Richards had been away, and he had left word for him to follow as quickly as he could. Dr. Truman examined the patient carefully, and questioned Pauline and her sons rigidly.

"It has been threatening for weeks," he said then. "The extent of the damage I can not tell yet—the trouble is purely cerebral. She has been worrying and suffering great mental excitement. She may recover——"

Gregory clung to the foot of the bed, his face as pale as his mother's own.

"She *may* recover, doctor—you mean——"

"There is danger, of course. And there is also a chance——"

More than that he would not say. He wrote out a prescription, and Bertram returned with him to the town to have it filled. He told Pauline just how to administer the medicine and to watch its effects carefully. Father Richards came in, looking a little white and shaken, for the past night had been an eventful one, and he had been kept pretty steadily on his feet. He spoke to Dr. Truman, and went on upstairs to Mrs. Lackland's room. Pauline had already made preparation for the giving of the last rites. He could only administer Extreme Unction; then he exchanged a few words with Pauline and Gregory, and went away, leaving the two once more to their lonely vigil.

"You *must* lie down, Pauline," said Gregory then. "I will call you as soon as Bertram comes, and we will give her the medicine. But at least save your strength for to-morrow—to-day, I should say; it is almost two o'clock now."

But though the girl obeyed him, and threw her-

self down on her bed, it was not to sleep. She was inexpressibly lonely. The scene had brought back all the past; once more she looked into her dying mother's face, once more she knelt at her dying mother's bedside. How the two boys loved their mother—even Bertram, the indolent, could not trust any other hands to carry out the doctor's orders! How Gregory brooded over her, his eyes fixed yearningly on the gray and shadowed face, on its cold, pinched features. Yes, she had her sons—her sons who loved her! She had been a cherished daughter, a cherished wife, she was a cherished mother! While Pauline——

Ah! Even if she had known a mother's tender love, that love was one of fear and of pain. She had never known her mother to be really happy or free from worry. And now that a new love was proffered her, she must shut her eyes to it, steal away from it secretly, turn her back on it for ever!

But not yet. There was work for her to do, work that no one else could accomplish so faithfully; work that no paid hands could accomplish more skilfully. She would do her duty here—here, where generosity and affection had been be-

stowed on her, and when that duty was ended, she would go as she had come.

So, during the days that followed, she carried out to the utmost the plan that she had laid down. She was, indeed, strong as she knew, as she felt herself to be, and she proved that strength in her untiring vigilance. Gregory, plunging into the vortex of business affairs, brought his brother with him. In spite of their wishes, their desires, both brothers were forced to spend hours away from that quiet bedside. But silently, quietly, with the precision of an automaton, and the skill born of her great longing to repay this woman for some of that good which she had bestowed upon her, Pauline Faulkner remained, an ever-present ministering spirit, obeying with preciseness the slightest order of the physician, and caring for Laura Lackland as only a tender-hearted woman can care for another. In all that time, however she accomplished it, Mrs. Lackland never woke from her brief slumbers to miss the girl from her side. She was conscious always of her presence, her care, her unremitting attention.

A fortnight elapsed, in which Laura Lackland hovered between life and death. The doctor did

not despair of her, although he held out no hope. Her spirit fluttered, as it were, to be gone, but her indomitable will seemed to keep it within her body.

"She has a powerful desire to live," said Dr. Truman one day. "Her will is greater than her physical strength, and that is a great help to us now. Her will, and yours, Miss Pauline."

And every day brought Gregory and the girl closer together, though no word of tenderness or love passed between them. To Pauline such a word would have been sacrilege. Between them, forevermore, dead or living, was that mother's opposition, to Pauline a barrier insuperable.

Then, slowly at first, so slowly that they thought it was a turn for the worse, came the turning for the better. Inch by inch she crept back to life. Almost imperceptibly, halting speech came to that inert tongue, and presently, a little movement to the heavy limbs. Dr. Truman was jubilant. It was a rare recovery, he told her sons—a recovery, due not only, after God, to his skill, but to Miss Faulkner's care.

"Without her I could have done nothing, absolutely nothing," he said.

The weeks went by. Christmas passed with very

little of the gay observance accorded the feast. January slipped on. In February Mrs. Lackland was able to sit at her window. As she grew stronger Gregory would have consulted her about factory affairs, but she would not listen.

"I am finished," she said quietly. "Do as you think best—you and Bertram. My work is almost done. God gave me back my life for one great purpose. When it is accomplished I am going."

He looked at her, wondering a little. These vague words were but the result of her weakness, her illness. As for that which he had accomplished he was satisfied. He had no fear that she would find fault with results.

One sunny, beautiful day toward the latter part of the month Pauline coaxed her patient to go downstairs to the terrace. She read aloud to her a great deal, and Mrs. Lackland took great pleasure in listening. But this day her thoughts were not her own, and more than once her eyes sought the young girl with a tenderness in their depths that seemed painful. Presently Pauline slipped a mark between the pages and put the book on her lap.

"You are almost well, Aunt Laura," she said.

"Almost, my dear child. I doubt if I shall ever be altogether well."

"There is no reason why you should not be," said the girl gently. "Dr. Truman gives us every hope. In a year you will not know you ever were ill."

"A year!" echoed Mrs. Lackland softly. "I have been sick over four months. The night I was stricken I thought myself the most important person in the world—I thought that my particular part of it could not go one day without me! Twenty-four hours without me!" She laughed softly, as if to herself. "Yet it has existed four months—and must exist another year!"

"When summer comes everything will be different," said Pauline gently. "You must not be despondent. We are too grateful to God, who has given you back to us, to feel the least repining."

"Yes, Pauline? Are you really glad?"

"Oh, dear Aunt Laura, you know."

"Yes, I know. It was a foolish question."

"But I must leave you," said Pauline then. "Not yet—oh, not until you are strong and can do without me. But then . . . I shall go."

"What will you do?"

"I will find my place."

"Your place! You have reached your journey's end, Pauline—your place is here with me, all the days that we two shall live. Or do you seek revenge?"

"Revenge?" The girl looked at her, startled.

"My strong desire brought me back to life," said Mrs. Lackland tenderly, "and shall I tell you what that was? The desire to do right by you, Pauline. I have insulted you bitterly, have made you suffer, my sweet, my sensitive girl! And yet, when you came to me that night, I shall never forget your look, the tone of your voice, the clasp of your arms! I can close my eyes and see it all, and I hear truth in your words, truth and love for me, calling me, who had spoken such bitter words to you, 'my dearest, my best friend!' Those words were the secret of my getting well, Pauline."

The girl could not speak. She was crying silently. Mrs. Lackland lifted her thin hand and touched her gently.

"Dear, you will not let anger and pride stand between us now? I want you for my own. I want you for the daughter that heaven denied me once,

to send me in you. Will you be my own child, Pauline, my dear boy's wife?"

Pauline slipped on her knees beside the invalid's chair, and looked into her face with eyes that pierced her soul.

"It is not—you are not saying this because of anything I have done——"

"As I hope for peace eternal, no, my dearest child. To say this is the only reason God allowed me to get well. Ah! I was very near the brink, Pauline, but I dared not die—not until I had undone the evil I had wrought. For I knew that I would stand ever as a shadow between your two hearts. Forgive, forgive!"

And Pauline had no words to say to her, but the clasp of her arms sufficed.

CHAPTER XVII

HELEN IS DEFIANT

AFTER the terrible events of that evening, when the news of the fire at Lyndhurst had reached her, coupled with the report that an attempt had been made on Gregory's life, and that Mrs. Lackland was dying, Marion Sigogne visited Lyndhurst. She had not meant ever to go near the Lackland home again, and already preparations for her departure were in progress. But of this latter part she said nothing to the Lacklands. She was pleasantly sympathetic to both young men, and her manner could be so unaffected, so guileless, that all her tender words passed for true coin. Bertram was delighted. He felt that that one little unpleasantness would soon be forgotten. Gregory was indifferent, save as her attitude affected Bertram. The fact that she adopted her usual friendliness of manner argued little in his eyes.

She sent over every morning to inquire, and called again later in the week. But on neither of these occasions did Helen accompany her, and no

inquiries on Bertram's part elicited any but the most meager information. She was well, but busy. She would come later, perhaps.

✓ Needless to say she did not come, and soon Bertram heard that the Sigognes had left The Pines. This, his first great disappointment, did much to sober the young man. He grew grave and thoughtful and more like Gregory in his manner, while Gregory, seeing history repeat itself in this treatment, opened his heart more fully to his brother, and showed him how his own early and misplaced affection had changed all his outlook on life.

"That may be," said Bertram quietly, "but this is not Helen's fault. She is not yet eighteen years old. If she forgets me I can not blame her."

"If she *can* forget you it is better that nothing comes of your affection," said Gregory gently.

"A young and beautiful girl can be easily distracted," said Bertram. "Besides—who knows what tales she has been told?"

This was only too true, and Gregory had nothing to say to it. He thought, also, that Bertram himself would soon forget when the object of his adoration was removed. But in this he was mistaken.

As the weeks passed on, the young man alluded less and less to the girl, but when Mrs. Lackland spoke to her two sons of her wish to see Pauline Gregory's wife before she died, and asked them to set a speedy date for the wedding, her words seemed to level the barriers that had hindered speech.

"I wish we could make it a double wedding," he said a little gloomily. Then he held out a note to his brother. "Read that—both of you."

"Dear Bertram," it began. "We are coming home for a fortnight to The Pines. Mother has forbidden me to let any one know, but I do not think she is right. Won't you please try to see me before we go away?"

Pauline read it silently. Gregory read it and handed it back.

"That does not look as if she has forgotten," he said gravely. "I think your Helen is the right sort."

"I have known it always," said the young man proudly.

"What do you mean to do?"

"I mean to ride over there in a few days and ask to see her."

"And if Mrs. Sigogne refuses to allow it?"

"Then I shall call on you for assistance," answered Bertram without a smile.

The following Saturday Bertram called at The Pines. Marion Sigogne herself saw him in the drawing-room.

"This is a surprise," she said pleasantly enough, "but one that I am afraid I can not return, as I am only here on business and will have to return at once. Helen? Oh, Helen is still in the city—she did not care to come, especially since my stay is to be so short."

"Well," said Bertram, relating this to his brother, "Mrs. Sigogne's objection to me was solely because I had no prospects or no settled income. Now I have both. Gregory, I want you, as the head of our house, to call on her and make a formal demand for Helen's hand in marriage."

"That's cool," said Gregory, laughing in spite of himself.

"It may be—it may sound so. But you can talk statistics, which would not sound well from me. Will you do this?"

"With pleasure," said Gregory, "although," with a faint smile, "I'm afraid I shall have no more success than you——"

"I want a decided answer," said the young man. "I shall know how to act then."

Keenly curious as she was to find out all that had happened at Lyndhurst, Marion Sigogne would not question Bertram. She would not display a wish to learn anything about their affairs, so beyond the bare inquiry concerning Mrs. Lackland she said nothing. However, on the morning that Gregory drove over she had heard of his engagement to Pauline. A sullen spirit had been smoldering in Marion Sigogne's heart since that last interview with the two brothers in November, and this news, confirming what she already knew to be the truth, awoke a desire for revenge. If Gregory Lackland could prefer a nobody, one whose father probably had a price on his head, the associate of lawbreakers—well, he could have her!

She had been thinking thoughts of this description when Gregory's name was given to her. For the moment she meant to decline to see him, but then she changed her mind. She swept into the room, proud, haughty, self-possessed, beautiful.

"You surprise me pleasantly," she said in her clear tones. "I did not expect such an honor."

"Thank you," he answered, bowing. "I am here

to-day on a very important affair, Mrs. Sigogne." And then, without preamble, he stated Bertram's wishes, and gave her succinctly some of his ideas and plans for the future. She listened in silence, resting her two elbows on the arms of her chair, her fingers interlocked idly.

"That is nice," she said. "But you and Bertram also forget that Helen does not know her own mind. She is barely eighteen. It is not fair to bind a girl of that age, a child who should still be in the school-room——"

"My dear Mrs. Sigogne, no one is asking for an early marriage," interrupted Gregory.

"Father Richards would surely not approve of a long engagement," said Mrs. Sigogne mockingly.

"Under these circumstances? Why not? The young people will see little of each other. If they desire to correspond, allow it—it is not good to have anything like that done in an underhand manner. Let the engagement be merely implied, if you will, for the next three years. In that time Bertram will be a husband worth having if he develops as he has done since meeting Helen."

"You plead excellently," she said. "Your brother, displaying fine business acumen, knew how

to make use of his opportunities. In winning my daughter's affections he did not fail to grasp the fact that she inherited a good portion of her father's wealth."

Gregory rose at once.

"That is scarcely necessary," he said. "I need scarcely remind you that Bertram is not penniless. Money is not the thing to be considered in the choice of a wife."

Marion burst out laughing.

"I see!" she said. "You are evidently speaking from experience. A good name, spotless reputation, proper upbringing—all these are of little value, either, I suppose? Especially for you?"

"Good-morning," said Gregory. He was pale as a sheet. The lady looked at him serenely, not an eyelash quivering under the glance of utter contempt he gave her. He left the room and the house. As he went down the steps, he saw Helen standing at Soliman's head, patting the horse tenderly. She was quite pale, Gregory thought, and her beautiful little face seemed thinner than usual. She gave him one hand frankly, but continued to rub Soliman's velvet nose with the other.

"It's good just to get a look at the horse," she said, smiling. "You have seen my mother?"

"Yes, Helen. We understood you were in the city."

"Oh, did you!" She opened her eyes in astonishment.

"Bertram was here some days ago and was given to understand that you had not come to The Pines."

"Did he see—Mrs. Sigogne?"

"Yes."

"And you? Why did you come here this morning?"

"On a little errand of Bertram's," he said evasively.

"Oh! I understand!" She was very quick of comprehension. Two spots of color flashed into her cheeks. "Will you tell . . . your brother, Gregory, that I shall bring him my answer myself?"

"My dear Helen——"

"I must and I shall see Bertram," she said, stamping her foot. "There is nothing wrong in calling on your mother or on Pauline? No? Very well. Please ask your mother to expect me."

She turned toward the house. Marion Sigogne

had been standing at the window. She had seen the meeting, and it angered her.

"Helen!" she called, as the girl passed the open door. "Come in here—I want to speak to you."

Helen hesitated a moment. Then she entered the room, rebellious, defiant.

"You were talking to Gregory Lackland?"

"Yes. I gave him a message for his mother."

"Let it end at that, then."

"Oh, but I told him I was going to call on her."

"You can not call at Lyndhurst while Pauline Faulkner is there. I will not have you associate with her."

"I am sure Gregory would not ask Pauline to marry him if she were not a thoroughly good girl," said Helen tempestuously. "I think all these things you've been telling me about her are not true. She is just as sweet as she can be."

"I am not in the habit of telling untruths."

"Then why did you tell Bertram that I was still in the city—that I had not come to The Pines?"

"Because I wanted to save you much trouble and annoyance," said Marion Sigogne. "If you would only be sensible——"

"I have been thoroughly miserable since you've

tried to make me sensible," said Helen, repressing a sob with difficulty. "Bertram and Pauline and I were so happy! And now everything is upset. . . . At any rate, I'm going to Lyndhurst."

"I forbid you to go—absolutely forbid you to go," said her stepmother hotly. "Let that be the last word on the subject now, or you go back to the convent."

"At least I was happy and contented there," said Helen. "I had a home—which is more than I have had in a good while, running about from one place to the other. Do please send me back. I know Mother Patrick will be only too glad to have me."

Then Helen left the room, went up the stairs, and changed her outdoor dress, putting on her riding-habit. She had not the slightest fear of her stepmother, and, docile in almost everything, absolutely refused to obey when she considered her obedience uncalled for. Ten minutes later she was in the stable.

"Saddle my horse, Dan," she said to the hostler.

In five minutes more she was well on her way to Lyndhurst. She gave little thought to her actions, but hardly had she reached the great gate that led to the Lackland mansion when a doubt assailed

her. She drew her horse in quickly. What would she do—what must she do now. . . . Perhaps it was not right . . . unmaidenly. . . . And then a joyous voice called her name, and the next moment Bertram was at her side.

“Helen! Helen! I can scarcely believe my eyes! It is really you, my dear girl! Come, let me help you down. How pleased mother will be! She was talking of you only a half-hour ago—wishing she could see you!”

“Here I am,” laughed Helen gayly. “I promised Gregory I would bring the answer myself—I have brought it.”

“The answer! The answer!” He caught her cold little hands in his, and his face was dazzling. “Helen, my own darling, what is the answer? Not unfavorable or you would not bring it. You will marry me? And soon?”

“Yes,” she whispered, her face scarlet. She did not lift her eyes to his. He carried her hand to his lips.

“My darling! My own darling! Believe me, you will never, never regret it.”

There was a tender reverence in his voice. Helen realized that her boy lover had disappeared, that

Bertram was suddenly a man, and she felt that his love for her had made him so. A sensation of exquisite happiness filled her. She scarcely knew how she reached the great stone terrace on which sat Mrs. Lackland, with Pauline beside her. Bertram led her directly to his mother.

"Bless us, dearest mother," he said, in a trembling voice. "Helen has promised to marry me."

CHAPTER XVIII

MRS. SIGOGNE HAS A VISITOR

MARION SIGOGNE had been expecting a visitor all morning—one that she had thought to see enter at any time during Gregory's short stay, and one whom she did not wish him to meet. She was playing idly on the piano, going over snatches of different airs, when he was at last announced.

"I am so glad you changed your mind about that foreign appointment," she said now, giving him her hand with every appearance of frank cordiality.

"I was surprised to get your note—how did you know I was in town? I came back only last night——"

She shook her finger at him playfully.

"I hear many things," she said, with a low laugh. "It is because of one of the things I heard that I sent for you."

He glanced toward the door.

"Oh, you need not be afraid—there is no one about. Helen has just gone to her room in a rage because I will not let her marry Bertram

Lackland." She laughed again, but there was a note of irony in the laugh this time. Julian Stanhope lifted his eyebrows cynically.

"Then I must have seen Helen's ghost dashing past me as fast as her horse could carry her toward Lyndhurst."

Marion Sigogne looked at him, astounded, before she rang the bell sharply.

"Find out if Miss Helen has left the house," she said to the butler.

"Yes, madam—she left about five minutes ago."

"That is all." She smiled at Julian Stanhope. "I am very sorry you will not see her," she said. This was for the benefit of the servant. When he left the room her expression changed completely. "I shall deal with her later on," she said. "At present—do you know that Gregory Lackland is engaged to Pauline Faulkner?"

For a moment the steely blue eyes met hers. They said nothing that she could interpret.

"That is news indeed," he said. "When, may I ask, did this occur?"

"I heard it some hours ago."

"Some hours ago! Had you suspected it?"

"I suspected that he cared for her—but I

thought that Mrs. Lackland would never give her consent to the match. I do not think she would now, if——”

“If——”

“You understand me, I am sure. That—that creature! Pardon me, if I offend you—I believe that you at one time cared for her? But I feel this very much. She has hated me from the beginning, I know—and I assure you that I return her feeling. She is insufferable.”

Julian Stanhope examined his polished nails very carefully.

“What would you suggest?” he said, then, in smooth accents. “Are you sure— Now, about hating you— Do you think that?”

Marion Sigogne gave him a curious glance—that slow, drawling tone seemed utterly unlike his usual crisp voice. Then she shrugged her shoulders.

“Surely there is something—I know she is not of creditable people. . . . There is something in her past. . . . It might be made impossible for her to marry——”

“I see—I understand now. I’m glad you sent for me.”

She smiled, gratified.

"I thought I had not misplaced my confidence. May I depend on you?"

"Yes—if I can depend on you. I am not in a position, just at present, to pay the price that some people will expect. I believe that one man has been bought off by the Lacklands already. Would you like to know how much they paid him?"

Her eyes sparkled.

"Tell me, tell me," she exclaimed.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Twenty-five thousand dollars!" she breathed. "The Lacklands bought him off! Oh, then, there must be something . . . you know what I mean. There must be more to this than I have surmised. How did you find out?"

"I have my own way of learning such things. I may as well tell you that there never was a question of diplomatic appointment with me—I had something else in view when I brought up that possibility."

"But Judge Masterson——"

"I made sure that rumors of it would reach him from authentic sources. When I cover ground I cover it thoroughly."

"I—see," she hesitated a moment. "As to money——"

"Old Sigogne left four or five million, I believe," was the cool reply, "divided equally between wife and daughter."

"You are right. You can let me know from time to time what is necessary."

"Thank you. You may expect results—well, shortly. I suppose it will not be necessary to explain the different processes——"

"No—I am only interested in the outcome. You have our city address. My business here will be finished to-morrow. I shall not stay longer."

She pondered a long while after Julian Stanhope left her, weighing all things carefully, and considering, in the light of this new ally, what her attitude should be toward Helen and the Lacklands. She had not expected such prompt assistance from Julian Stanhope, though she had known that his interest in Pauline Faulkner was of remoter date than that of their first meeting during the past twelve-month. He had implied that much to her always, and she also knew that in spite of his assumption of coldness he was very much in love with her. So at least she was sure of his

personal interest in the affair—a thing that could not be bought.

She greeted Helen mildly when, an hour later, she turned in at 'The Pines' entrance, and cantered up to the door, Bertram escorting her. As they passed the steps on the way to the stable, Marion stepped out on the terrace.

"Just a minute," she said. She went down to them, with a searching glance into the defiant and beautiful face. "Perhaps I have been a little too hard on you children," she went on gently. "You must forgive me for it. Bertram, we are leaving The Pines to-morrow afternoon, but you can come over in the morning if you wish. I hear you are a business man now, but perhaps Gregory will spare you for an hour or two."

"Do you mean that you will consent—" began the young man impetuously. She raised her hand.

"Wait a while—we shall see. I want Helen to be happy. I will consent to an engagement, if you give me your word that there will be no talk of marriage between you—for a time at least."

"I can promise that, mother," said Helen quickly. "And you will, too, won't you, Bertram?"

"I will promise," he answered, smiling. "You

have made me very happy, Mrs. Sigogne. You will allow Helen to write to me?"

"Yes—on condition that she doesn't write more than three letters a day," said the lady, with a charming smile. "Shall we shake hands on it, Bertram?"

They shook hands warmly and parted, and Bertram went home filled with happiness, bubbling over with delight. All might have been as of old between the Sigognes and the Lacklands were it not for that one remark by which Marion Sigogne had shown her bitterness toward Pauline Faulkner. It rankled in Gregory's heart like a thorn. He could not forget it—he felt that he would never forgive it.

Whether or not it was as Laura Lackland had said—whether her desire to right what she felt had been a wrong, toward one who loved her and whom she truly loved, had brought back her strength temporarily, no one could tell. But at any rate her recovery had reached its zenith on that day when she gave Pauline, gladly, freely, lovingly to her son. From then on, little by little, step by step, inch by inch, just as she had gained in strength, she lost it. At first it was imperceptible, as the

gaining had been. Two weeks after that happy day, it struck Pauline, suddenly, that the mother appeared more languid than usual. They were getting ready for church, and it seemed to the girl that she rested longer and at more frequent intervals. It had been her habit to drive daily to Mass since she had been able to leave her bed, for, as her hold on life lessened, she leaned more toward things spiritual. Her beads never left her fingers. She carried with her, from room to room, from terrace to garden, the prayer-book in which that good and great priest, Father Lasance, himself acquainted well with sickness and distress, has gathered so many beautiful prayers to help those who need just such spiritual comfort. As the veil between her and the other world seemed to sway slightly, she was filled with great yearning to be done with all material things. Father Richards, with a brow from which the wrinkles of care seemed to have magically disappeared, so happy was he over the renewed prosperity of his flock, preached this Sunday morning. He had chosen that tender text "Come unto Me," and his heart was in the words.

Laura Lackland seemed to drink in every word

of that sermon. She sat back silently during the long drive home to Lyndhurst. As she went up the terrace steps, she paused and looked about her—a long, sweeping, almost loving glance. And then she touched Gregory on the arm.

“Look with me, my son—let us look at it together. When I come down these steps again, my feet will not touch them.”

“My dear mother! What a thing to say!” he exclaimed. But she pressed his arm tightly.

“Be as good a man as your father was—and love God better than your mother did. I am sorry now. I have wasted many years that might have been spent in the pure love of God. I see my folly. Love God—and teach Pauline, who has had so little good in her luckless life, to love Him better, by your example.”

Gregory could make no answer. He was very fond of his mother, but her illness had filled him with a passionate tenderness toward her. A moisture dimmed his eyes which he would not let her see, but the pressure of his arm about her spoke for him. Very gently and lovingly he went with her to her own room. No servant was ever permitted to do a single thing for her—he or Bertram or

Pauline was always ready to anticipate her wishes. She sat down exhausted in an easy-chair, while Pauline slipped off her coat and hat, and Bertram got her slippers.

“What children, what children!” she smiled. “I never appreciated them before.”

“You’ve been doing for us always,” said Bertram. “It is now our grateful privilege to do for you.”

Her eyes closed in a tired fashion. Pauline made a little sign to the brothers, and they went out of the room—Gregory to go down to the terrace, and stand leaning against its broad stone pillars, filled with anxiety and foreboding. Pauline joined him there a few minutes later. One look into his face showed her the trend of his thoughts.

“What do you think of my mother, Pauline?” he asked in a low tone.

“I think she is very weak, Gregory,” she answered gently. “But then we must expect just such spells of weakness. She will gain this summer, here, surrounded by the pines, and in the fall we can take her away—with us.”

She blushed faintly as she concluded the sentence.

"That is a happy thought, dear. But she may not consent."

"Then we shall not go," said Pauline promptly. "There is no consideration that would take me away from her while she needs either of us. She is exhausted now—this illness has drained her strength, and possibly she has been getting about too much. We must be more careful. You will see, Gregory, you will see."

And then she led him to talk of other things—of the factories, and the work he loved. Of Bertram and his future. Of his plans and schemes. Of what had been accomplished, and was still to be accomplished for the people dependent upon him. Before he was aware of it his despondency had taken wings. He was enthusiastic, earnest, forceful, and she listened to him with rare intelligence and sympathy. She took the burden from his heart, but she could not lift it from her own. She saw too clearly, and she knew, she knew!

CHAPTER XIX

THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS

THE next day Laura Lackland did not leave her big chair at the window. Dr. Truman paid his usual morning visit and examined her carefully, asking many pertinent questions. She smiled a little.

"I don't think it will be very long," she said. "I am ready."

"That is not the spirit that brought you this far, my dear lady," he answered bluntly.

"No, doctor—I had a purpose, and now my purpose is fulfilled." She shrugged her shoulders. "The old life seems so very far away from me. I know there was once a woman who was energy to the finger-tips, who planned as if this life were everything, as if another was not to come! How foolish of her! I think God is good to us to give us time to see the disparity between this and the other existence. It would have been hard for that woman to die—very hard. For this woman—it is very easy."

Dr. Truman was vexed. He had been proud of her recovery—it had been a wonderful triumph for him, because totally unexpected, unlooked for.

“You forget that you can be a power for good in many ways,” he said. “There is much for a woman of your kind to do in this world—and if you have lived for yourself as long as you say, it is not right to stop at that. Live for God for a while before you return to Him, lest your hands be empty.”

He was a good Catholic and he spoke with feeling. She gave him a swift, startled glance.

“Don’t make me *want* to live,” she said, and there was suffering in her tones. “It has been so easy because I do not want to stay here. If you make it hard for me—now— Oh! can’t you see, with all your skill, the futility of battling against this enemy?”

And as if the words had taken all the strength she had left, her head dropped back upon the pillow and her face went ashen. He took her hand in his, and motioned to Pauline to give her some of the cordial which he had ordered for these weak moments. Before he left she was much brighter.

He had been gone some ten minutes, when he returned hurriedly.

"Father Richards gave me this for you," he said, handing Pauline a small white envelope. "He said it came with the rectory mail yesterday in an envelope addressed, oddly enough, to the pastor of the Catholic church, with the request that it be delivered into your own hands. As he knew I was coming here he asked me to attend to it. I had almost forgotten it, in my interest in Mrs. Lackland."

Pauline took the envelope with some misgivings. She received no outside communications. Letters from Helen reached her—her only correspondent. She did not know the stiff, square handwriting on this missive. Dr. Truman looked at her curiously—she seemed upset.

"You are not expecting bad news, I hope?" he asked.

"No, doctor, oh, no!"

"Because in that case, you had better burn your message. You will have no time for anything now but plain hard work."

"Doctor!" Pauline looked at him aghast. She had suspected it, but to have her fears put into words startled her. "Then you think——"

"She will not recover from the next attack," he

said gently. "Be prepared, and prepare her children."

For a long time after he went away Pauline sat, the unopened letter in her hands, her eyes fixed on vacancy. Her friend was going to die—slipping from her, and she could not keep her. A little sigh escaped her lips. At least there was one consolation. She could remain with her to the end. She could make all things as easy for her as it was possible for a pair of loving hands to make them. She would guard her night and day; she would not sleep or eat while she thought she could soothe or help her: she would not think of anything or any one beyond that room upstairs. Oh, if love could pay her back for what she had been to her, then love indeed should be taxed heavily!

And so she took up the square white envelope in her hand, the envelope with its heavy, black writing, and broke the seal.

* * * * *

It had grown very dark, she thought, wearily, putting her hand to her head, and Mrs. Lackland would be looking for her. She tried to clear the mists from her brain, from her eyes—but they would not go. And then she suddenly realized that

it had not grown dark, that the sun was shining. She could not think clearly. She rose to her feet. Her limbs were shaking, tottering under her. Why, what was this terrible thing that had happened to her? What had happened?

Her eyes fell on the envelope lying at her feet—at the letter beside it. She shuddered and put her hand to her throat, gasping like a stricken thing, her eyes distended, fastened only on that letter as if it had been alive.

Oh! She dared not leave it there! And yet she dared not touch it! She dared not, dared not!

She stood rigid, her hands clasped at her sides, trying to gain courage, trying to think with some clearness. But her thoughts would not be controlled. A terrible fear swept over her that her mind was wandering.

And then, mechanically, she braced herself to the task that lay before her. She walked back to the chair, holding to it with rigid fingers. But just as she stooped toward the innocent-looking missive, Gregory came into the room.

He paused. One glance at her white face was enough—just one glance.

"Pauline! Pauline, my darling! What is it? What is the matter?"

She did not answer him. He went to her, unclasped her hands from the chair and put his arms about her.

"My dear child, tell me what has happened."

She pointed to the floor, to the letter. Then words came.

"O Gregory! Read it, read it!"

With an arm about her still, he stooped and picked up the letter, and without releasing her, read it through. His grave face was graver when he finished.

"MY DEAR PAULINE:" it began.

"I am here, in the city, in one of its meanest streets, hiding from justice, if you would call it that. Father wrote to me. Told me he was ill, dying, begged of me to go to him. Cyril discovered the letter, and was about to give news of father's whereabouts to the society when I found it out. Pauline, the papers say that my husband is dying—dying, but I could not help it—I did not mean to kill him. There was a boat that night. I took it, and got away. When I reached father, and told him all, he said we had better hide away to-

gether. The city is so large, so strange, no one will ever find us here, please God. But father can not live a month longer. I am worn out taking care of him, and I have no money. I have sold everything. Even my clothes are gone now. Pauline, won't you come to me? Help me. Save me.

"I will not put my address here. I am afraid. If you are coming, you must reach me on Saturday. On that day, at six o'clock in the evening, I will stand on the corner of ——— Street. I don't know where it is, but I will find it. For God's sake, Pauline, do not fail me. I am desperate.

"Your loving sister,

"MURIEL"

"Saturday!" moaned the girl, through ashen lips. "Saturday—and to-day is Thursday! Oh, Gregory, what shall we do?"

"Let me think, my own dear girl. You can not leave my mother now."

"Gregory!" Her voice was one of anguish. "At least your mother is surrounded by every comfort. *They* are suffering, in want, hungry, perhaps. Gregory, the thing terrifies me!"

"You must bring them here, Pauline."

Again she shrank.

"I could not do that, Gregory—you have had enough——"

"My child, they are your people. They need you. But your people are my people now, and I need you. My mother needs you—she can not do without you. This house is big and comfortable. Your father, if he is really very ill, needs care and attention—perhaps care and attention will cure him. My dear girl, there is no other way out of it."

She listened to him, hope dawning in her heart. Oh, it was so good to meet difficulties and trials with his arms about her!

"I shall tell my mother," went on Gregory. "She knows your father—she will be glad to have him here——"

"But Muriel—" said Pauline, shuddering. "Do you see what she says of her husband——"

"She may hardly realize what her words convey," said Gregory soothingly. "Do not fret until you must. Foolish girl! Why did she not send her address—I would have been able to relieve you of all responsibility. As it is, I am going with you."

Mrs. Lackland eagerly seconded Gregory's prop-

osition to bring Pauline's father and sister to Lyndhurst, and so the frightful gloom that had fallen on Pauline's spirits was pierced by a ray of light. She was indeed fearfully depressed—there was a sensation of impending trouble which she could not shake off. Gregory had long since told her he had disposed of Penniston, and while he said that he had given him money, he did not say how much. She lived in mortal terror of the man who had been so cruelly mixed up in her life, and the thought of traveling alone to the city was only a shade less fearful than her horror of meeting Penniston. It was a wonderful relief to feel that Gregory would be near her.

"I will not say anything to him," she thought, going over the thing in her own mind. "I can't live all my life in terror of that man—I must overcome it. He can not hurt me if I am not afraid of him." And then she added, half-aloud: "But thank God, that this time, at least, I shall have Gregory."

On Saturday there was a sudden hurried call for Dr. Truman and Father Richards. Mrs. Lackland took a sudden turn for the worse. When the hour for Pauline's departure drew near, they felt that

death was hovering above her. Torn with anxiety, Pauline for the moment had no thought of self.

"O Gregory, I must go, I *must* go. But I shall come back as quickly as I can—I will come back to-night, if possible. And you dare not come with me— I would never forgive myself if anything happened to Aunt Laura while you were away. Please, Gregory, do not worry so," for he was in as great a ferment as herself. "You must stay here—here. And I shall send you a telegram just as soon as ever I can."

With this all were forced to be content. Gregory urged her to take one of the servants with her, but Pauline knew too well the danger of permitting a stranger to see or hear anything of her private concerns until she had ascertained their true gravity. She had money—plenty of it. Gregory saw to that at least, and she felt that she could take care of herself. Yet he did not know the sinking sensation, the icy shudder that seemed to sweep over her form, the cold clutch upon her heart, as they stood together on the station, waiting for the express.

"You will reach the depot at 5.40," he said. "Telegraph immediately to me. It will take you

ten minutes to get to —— Street. I shall expect another telegram from you at seven o'clock. Give me the address, and don't spare explanation."

She nodded. The train was coming nearer. They would part in a few moments. He kissed her tenderly.

"Would to heaven I were going with you, my own dear Pauline," he said; "my own dear sweetheart! But keep up like the brave girl you are. Nothing can go wrong with you, I know. To-morrow morning, perhaps, I shall be able to join you, if anything happens that you can not come to me."

She braced herself quickly. It needed every bit of courage she possessed to keep from her lips the cry of protest, of fear, that seemed bursting in her brain. Still she smiled at him faintly, pressed his hand in both hers a moment, and then ran quickly up the steps of the train. The wait was only of a few minutes' duration. She pressed her face against the glass and looked out to where Gregory stood on the platform. He waved his hand and watched her—watched her until the train carried her away from him. Then, with a heavy sigh, for he, too, had been cheerful for her sake, he went

back to Lyndhurst, to what, he felt, was a death-bed.

The train was rather crowded. Pauline saw a seat at the opposite end near the door and she was passing through the aisle to reach it, when a quick, sharp voice accosted her.

"Miss Faulkner!"

She started, staring with something like alarm into Julian Stanhope's face. He rose and lifted his hat.

"There is a seat here—won't you let me make you comfortable?" He stood aside, barring her progress, so that the very act of passing him would have attracted the attention of the other passengers. She smiled politely, and took the seat at the window, while he sat beside her. He was courteous and respectful, and adopted a studied, distant attitude at first, which allayed any fear she might have had.

"I understand Mrs. Lackland is very ill?" were his first words.

"Very ill," said Pauline. "We do not think she will get better."

"A splendid woman—a valuable woman, too," he said. "I always liked her. Mrs. Sigogne will

be inconsolable. I saw her yesterday; she was speaking of her, telling me what friends they had always been, until recently."

"Mrs. Lackland has always spoken highly of Mrs. Sigogne," said Pauline. "Of course, her illness—one can't be very social when one is so ill."

"I don't think Mrs. Sigogne paid much attention to that. She is simply a little hurt, I think."

His words made Pauline uncomfortable—they seemed to imply so much more than was on the surface. Julian Stanhope had never seemed a gossiping man. She wondered why he was talking in this strain to her.

"Of course, Mrs. Sigogne and Gregory were to have been married," he went on, in his smooth, non-committal voice. "A family arrangement, I believe—which was upset by a charming stranger."

He laughed under his breath, and the girl colored hotly.

"I know that Gregory and Mrs. Sigogne were at one time promised to each other," she said. "But that was long ago—before her marriage. It was not my intention to upset any one's arrangements."

He laughed again, and the girl's resentment subsided. After all, why should she care what this

man thought of her? They were now and always would be strangers to each other. Perhaps he read the indifferent expression that stole across her face, for when he spoke again it was in another tone, and on some casual matter. Pauline answered him briefly, showing him very plainly that conversation was distasteful.

The hours sped on. He left her several times, and once he spent a long while in the smoking-car, during which interval Pauline was glad to relax her tired nerves. She felt strained to breaking-point when he was so near. She had not forgotten that it was he who had brought the message from Muriel, that he knew Penniston. The slightest hint of her affairs now might make him suspicious. And yet she could not avoid him. If she went into another car he might imagine that she was anxious to get away from him, and she could not count on the extremes to which curiosity might lead him. He must not witness her meeting with Muriel.

So far he had asked her no questions concerning her destination, but as the train approached nearer and nearer to the great station, he evinced a slight curiosity.

"Who is to meet you?" he asked.

"No one," she answered briefly. "I am going directly to the Saginaw. I expect Mr. Lackland to-morrow."

She said this so circumspectly that he had no reason to doubt her words. When they got off the train later, he hesitated.

"Have you any objections to my seeing you safe to your hotel?" he asked. "You are not very well acquainted with the city——"

"Thank you very much," she responded, "but I have been to the Saginaw before, and I promised to send a message home before doing anything else. I am very grateful to you, however," and she held out her hand. He could urge no other excuse to remain with her, but shook hands cordially, and Pauline saw him depart with the greatest sense of relief.

She had no intention of going near the Saginaw, but she felt that she would have had to go there if the man persisted in forcing his attentions on her. Now that she was relieved of the contingency, she went at once to one of the tables near-by and wrote out her telegram.

"Arrived safe. Now 5.45." She waited a mo-

ment, then wrote, as by an afterthought: "Julian Stanhope in train down."

She could not tell why she added that, save that the fact, which had annoyed her, seemed important just then. She looked at her watch two or three times. She would reach — Street positively in less than ten minutes, and she did not want to stand there a second longer than necessary. Presently she rose and passed through the great swinging doors, out into the surge of humanity passing to and fro along the busy street. And as she reached the corner which her sister had appointed, a clock in a near-by tower boomed out the strokes that told her she was punctual to the very moment. She pushed her veil well off her face, so that there might be no mistake, her eyes seeking anxiously for the countenance she remembered so well. And as she gazed, some one pushed against her roughly, and the next moment a voice whispered:

"Go ahead—straight down the avenue. I am following. Walk until I join you."

Pauline did not even glance toward the speaker. She turned straight ahead as she was bidden, and pulled her dark veil down quickly. There was

neither excitement nor hurry in her walk. She had traversed perhaps two or three blocks when a hand was laid lightly on her arm.

"I shall go ahead now. Follow me. It is a long walk, but we dare not risk riding."

To Pauline indeed the walk seemed interminable. She had no idea who might be ahead of her. The voice was scarcely Muriel's—the figure shrouded in a long, black cloak of some coarse material, surely not Muriel's. And yet no one else could have recognized her. Past the silent houses of respectability they went, past lighted streets and stores, into a mean and miserable neighborhood. A terrible odor assailed Pauline's nostrils—the stench of a near-by *abattoir*. The houses were rickety shanties, poor and unclean. Her guide plunged into what appeared to be the very worst of these in a long and terrible block. The halls were badly lighted, the stairs worn black, the handrails shaky and tottering. Up, up they went, four long flights, to the very topmost story. Not a word was spoken between them, and Pauline had no glimpse of the woman's face. She opened the door with a key she had been holding in her hand, evidently. Not a glimmer of light showed in the

room beyond, but a cough low and hollow, greeted them.

"We are here, father," said the woman who opened the door. "Pauline has not failed us."

In another moment the lamp was lighted, and Pauline stood anxiously on the threshold. She stood silent, gazing about her. The woman, tired out, evidently, had thrown herself into a chair beside the table. On a couch close at the window a man was lying. Pauline's hand went to her heart when she saw him.

It was indeed her father—his gaunt, gray wreck, rather, with hollow, burning eyes set under cavernous temples, with parched, parted lips, his long thin hands lying clawlike on the dark shawl which covered him. Pauline came into the room and closed the door behind her.

"Father!" she whispered, and then the hot tears welled quickly to her eyes. "Oh, my father, what has happened to bring you to this evil pass?"

CHAPTER XX

EXTRADITION

THE woman at the table threw back the cloak that covered her, and rose when Pauline's voice pierced the silence.

"Hunger, cold, privation, and the eternal chase of the tiger for its prey," she said, in a harsh, metallic voice. "Pauline—look at me."

Pauline looked. Was this Muriel? Muriel, her pale, pretty sister, with the soft, golden hair, the tenderly flushed cheeks, the beautifully curved chin and throat and rounded figure? She stared at the white-faced, plain woman before her with something like horror.

"Muriel! Oh, Muriel, surely you have not known hunger and privation?"

"That—and I have known worse," she said. "I was sold into slavery. I was abused and terrified, harried and tortured, until there is no red blood left in me. My father sold me—my *father*, and Penniston—and I did not rebel!"

"Hush, hush!" said Pauline, for a racking cough

seemed to tear apart the man on the sofa. "Muriel, my sister, my darling!" She held out her arms. "Come, dear. All that will be forgotten. I have a safe haven for you both, and comfort and plenty. O my darling, you shall suffer no more, no more!"

And at the gentle pity in her loving voice, the bitter heart within this woman melted. She clung to her sister tightly, eagerly, as if indeed, having found her, she could not let her go. At last hope had dawned for her! At last there was a glimmer of light in the maelstrom of darkness!

"And father!" said Pauline, then, in those gentle tones. She knelt beside the couch, and took his thin, hot hand in hers. "Poor father! No wonder you could not get better here. It will all be different now. Oh, why did you not let me know before? Why did you send all that long way for Muriel, when I was so much nearer?"

He raised himself on his elbow.

"Had I not wronged you enough?" he asked pantingly. "And Penniston was here, watching. I dared not bring you again into his clutches. I wrote to Muriel because there were papers—papers she must destroy. And then she came to me, my poor child!" He looked with infinite tender-

ness at the girl's drawn face. "I did not deserve it. I deserve nothing but to be let die like a dog."

"No, my father—do not talk like that. You shall not die. God is good, so good to us. Muriel, my dear, you told me you were—penniless."

"We have had nothing to eat since morning," she said.

"Nothing to eat since morning!" echoed Pauline. "And father?"

"Nothing."

"He has medicines——"

"No, nor doctors. We dare not risk it, Pauline. And we had no money to pay for either."

"Will you get them now—can you? Isn't there some one here whom you can trust? Some good woman who will help you?"

"The janitress who loaned me that coat—who loaned it only after I almost went on my knees for it. I daresay she thought I would never come back." She glanced at the prostrate form on the sofa, and turned aside, but Pauline knew, as well as if she had spoken, that she would never have come back indeed had her sister failed her. Pauline went to her side again, took off her own

warm cloak and put it on her, and tied her thick veil over her head.

"Are you able to get some one?" she asked gently. "Or if you will tell me where she is, I will find her. We must have fuel and a fire—this room is too cold for either of you. And we must have food. It is not too late for that. I have money—all the money we will need until I can get you both away with me. And as soon as father can be moved, we will take him to Lyndhurst."

The gaunt form on the sofa, a shadow of the well-preserved, well-cared-for man she remembered, sat up suddenly, terror in his eyes.

"Take us now, let us go now!" he said. "This is the time. To-morrow morning may be too late!"

But the effort exhausted him. He fell back again, shaking like a leaf.

"I will go, Pauline," said Muriel. Her voice was soft now, there was a note of the old sweetness in it. "I will see to the necessary things, and I can find a boy to bring up fuel. Sit and talk to father until I come back. There is nothing else for you to do."

So Pauline drew a chair close to her father's couch, and held his hand in hers, patting it gently.

She studiously avoided looking about her. The bare poverty of the place sent a chill to her heart.

"I am glad—she went away," said the father, after a moment. "I want to talk to you—Pauline. I am dying, child."

"You think so, but that is because you are so very weak," said Pauline, in low, reassuring tones. "You will get your strength back quickly. This neighborhood is not helping you to get better, and you have not had the proper care."

"My dear child, I wish I could tell you all. I wish I could begin from the beginning and tell you the whole thing. But I have not the strength. I sacrificed my home life, my health, my wife, my children, for—for the society. And then it turned—me down. And I paid no attention, seemingly, but I was planning my revenge. I got it. A revenge dearly bought. A revenge that is costing me my life."

"Father," said Pauline, "in leaving all that behind you—all that evil—and feeling that, perhaps, your years may be very few now, don't you want to think of—mother?"

"Ah, my dear! She is with me always."

"Then die a death like hers."

"Would to God that I could! There is no hope for me. Neither on earth nor in heaven. I have lived in defiance of God—will God hear me now when I have lost everything?"

"Not everything. God is still left," she answered. "God is always waiting."

"Not for me, not for me," he murmured.

The girl said no more. She rejoiced, rather, to find him in such an attitude. Her own spiritual sense had been more keenly alive since Mrs. Lackland's illness. She felt the necessity of God and of religion—faith, always awake in her heart, was now her most cherished possession. Yet she was still close enough to the old life to understand how little it meant to her father or to Muriel. They were shut out from the soul's dearest consolation. She would not intrude upon their attitude yet, but with God's help, that would come later on.

The kindled fire, the steaming coffee, the food that seemed to appear as if by magic within the next hour, revived all three. Pauline sipped the hot coffee gratefully, but she could eat nothing. The two girls watched beside their father, giving him only a little food at a time.

"I think we can risk a doctor," said Muriel.

"We will have a doctor early in the morning. And now, Pauline, let us understand each other. Are you positive we are wanted at Lyndhurst?"

"Positive. Mrs. Lackland is very ill, so ill that neither of her sons dared leave her to come with me to-night, but I promised them all that I would surely go back to-morrow, with father, if he could be moved. And I know he can be moved—anything is better than this terrible place."

"Are you not afraid? We have many enemies."

"They can not touch us at Lyndhurst," said the girl confidently. And then, with a strange look at her sister, as a sudden thought struck her, "Who is Julian Stanhope? Can you tell me?"

"Stanhope? Stanhope?" She looked at her curiously. "I have never heard the name."

"Did you ever give Wilfrid Penniston a message for me?"

"Never. I have not seen Wilfrid Penniston since you went away."

"Then it is more of his deceit," said the girl, her lip curling. "It is of no importance." She gave a quick glance toward her father. "He is asleep," she said, then, in an undertone. "Does he—is this his bed?"

"Yes," said Muriel. "There is more air here than in the stuffy inside room. Pauline, I am afraid you won't sleep much to-night. I have only a pallet on the floor."

"We will share it together," said Pauline, in steady tones. She looked at her watch. "I must send another telegram to Gregory—I promised him I would. Is there an office anywhere about here?"

"I do not think so. Why would you venture out again to-night? It is late—after eight o'clock."

"But I promised, I promised, Muriel. And if Gregory does not hear from me he will only suffer added anxiety——"

"Then it is Gregory," said Muriel softly. "Do you love him, Pauline?"

"With all my heart," was the low-toned answer. "With all my heart, Muriel."

Muriel sighed.

"That brings me back to something I hate to talk about," she said. "Cyril——"

Pauline put her hand on her sister's wrist, half-rising to her feet in quick alarm. She did not know why every noise, even the slightest, startled her, but the sound of feet on the stairs outside

seemed to chill the blood in her veins. With a despairing moan on her lips, Muriel cast her arms about her. And then Pauline knew that she must be strong—that no matter what danger threatened, she must be calm.

“This is the door, my good woman? You are positive of it? Very well.” There was a loud knock on the panels. The invalid started bolt upright on the sofa, gasping, his hand seeking his throat, as if he were unable to breathe. A stifled scream burst from Muriel’s lips, which Pauline checked with a warning look. She gently pushed her sister back in the chair, and opened the door. Two men entered quickly, and shut it behind them.

“Which one of you young ladies is known as Muriel Faulkner Morton?”

It had come. Muriel started up, but tottered, and would have fallen to the ground, had not Pauline caught and held her. The girl hid her face in Pauline’s bosom.

“You are arrested for the murder of Cyril Morton, your husband, madam, and I have here all the necessary papers, signed and made out. Will you accompany us quietly to headquarters?”

Strangely enough, they paid no heed to Muriel, but spoke directly to Pauline. An idea, entirely impractical, if she had taken time to think, darted into her brain. They imagined that she was Muriel! Well, she would take Muriel's place for the time being, until Gregory could come to their assistance, and show them what was best to be done.

"Yes," she said, then, quietly, speaking for the first time. "My dear sister, go to our father—he needs you," for John Faulkner had fallen back on the couch in a dead faint. And then Pauline went to the sofa and kissed the unconscious face tenderly, the men watching her intently. "Hush, dear sister! Do not cry so! I am not the least afraid," she spoke quickly, hurriedly. "Send word to Gregory—he will come at once and show you what to do."

"I can not—I will not——"

"You must, you must! Everything will be all right. Gentlemen, I am ready—won't you please take me away quickly? My sister is terribly excited and nervous."

"We have a carriage waiting," said one of the men.

"Thank you," said Pauline. She pressed her sister closely in her arms. "Send a telegram to Gregory. Tell him. He will see a way out. Not a word now or you will spoil all. And father can not spare you—yet."

She kissed to silence the words that trembled on Muriel's lips and then turned toward the men. One preceded and one followed her. The coach, an unusual sight in the neighborhood, was at the curb. A crowd had already gathered, but Pauline looked neither to the right nor left as she entered the vehicle. Muriel must be saved. She had no thought of the consequences, no thought of the outcome. She only knew that Muriel—the one threatened—must be free until Gregory could get to her and help them both.

CHAPTER XXI

DISASTER

"TO GREGORY LACKLAND, Lyndhurst, Rocks County, from John Faulkner, 240 East — Avenue.

"Come at once. Pauline in danger."

✓ Gregory had spent a sleepless night. He had sent the servants to the station every hour until midnight, hoping that when the second telegram did not arrive Pauline herself was coming. There would be no train from twelve until four in the morning, so that when the last train came, and she did not put in an appearance, he gave himself up to the keenest anxiety. Between two and three o'clock, the hour when so many lives flicker out, Mrs. Lackland seemed to be sinking very fast. Dr. Truman, when he heard of Pauline's departure, had resolved to spend the night with her. His prompt remedies and stimulants tided over the immediate danger, and at four o'clock she had regained her normal state.

Gregory received Muriel's telegram just as he got home from Mass. It had been delayed, and the news, coming on the anxious night he had just gone through, seemed the crowning blow. He could not refuse that call, it was too imperative—and yet how could he leave his dying mother?

With the telegram in his hand, he paced slowly up and down the outside room, which had been Pauline's. If he could only do something, anything, to relieve this fearful suspense! Bertram came to the door. His eyes were red and his voice muffled.

"Mother wants you, Gregory," he said. In another moment Gregory was bending over his mother's bed.

"Has Pauline—come back?" she asked faintly.

"No, mother."

"But you have heard from her?"

"Yes—a telegram from her father this morning."

"When will they be here?"

Gregory could not answer. "They—they are not certain," he faltered.

"That's Faulkner—he's proud, Gregory. Go

for him, you. I would like to see him before I die."

"Mother, I can not bear to leave you."

"Only for a few hours—I am strong again—I'm not in danger now, Gregory. Do please go, my son. For Pauline's sake, if not for her father's. I feel as if she needed you."

She tried to reach his cheek with her fluttering hand. He caught it and carried it to his lips.

"I'll go, then, mother—I'll take the next train down, and bring them back with me."

"John Faulkner will come—if you urge it, Gregory. He will not refuse my last request. We have been friends many years—too many years to let pride come between us."

Gregory went to see Dr. Truman before he started on his journey, telling him that he would probably be away the entire day. He had spent many disagreeable hours in his life, but the ones that intervened now were positive torture. His body was exhausted, his brain tired, but if by chance he dozed off, as the train carried him onward, frightful images rose before him—Pauline, weeping always, with Penniston's evil, sneering face close beside hers. And as he looked at that

face it seemed to be transformed into the smoother one of Julian Stanhope.

His heart sank still more when he reached the evil-looking, evil-smelling region, and sought the address given him on the telegram. He made inquiries here. A stout woman, clad in a worn and faded wrapper, was sweeping out the lower hall. Her eyes were swollen and inflamed as from weeping. Was all the world in trouble, thought Gregory Lackland, impatiently.

"Them's the people on the top floor," said the woman, when he mentioned the name. "Where the young lady was taken away from last night. A nice, sweet-spoken girl she was, too. Her sister's 'most crazy."

All this meant nothing to Gregory. He went upstairs at once, wondering how people could exist under the conditions which now presented themselves to him. He had learned little of life's hardships in his years of plenty and ease. It was **Muriel** who opened the door. Her tears had been spent long since. She was white and dry-eyed. On the sofa lay the prostrate body of a man. Gregory glanced at the ashen features with a chill of apprehension.

"He is dead," said Muriel dully. "He died this morning."

"This morning?" Gregory looked about the room, quickly. "Pauline?"

"I do not know where Pauline is. The officers came last night, and took her to prison. That is why I sent for you. They came for me, but she told them that she was the one they were looking for. And now, now will you take me with you to the jail, wherever it may be, and tell them the truth? I have been with my father to close his eyes. Let her come back to bury him."

"Then your—then he is dead, also? Your husband is dead?"

"So they say. I am sorry. I did not mean to kill him, but he had the revolver in his hand, threatening me, and in the struggle it went off. He did not die right away—but he told them I shot him." She sighed dryly, hopelessly. "It was like him to do that, and to revenge himself on me to the last."

"Poor thing, poor thing!" said Gregory compassionately. "But Pauline shall not leave you. And at least he is safe from harm," pointing toward the quiet, pulseless form on the sofa.

"I think so, I hope so. Poor Mrs. Leavitt came up this morning. Her boy Willie disappeared last night during the excitement, and hasn't been home since. When she saw how bad father was, she went for a priest. I think Pauline's coming must have softened him—he wouldn't let any one mention priest to him before. But at least he died—as—as my mother would have wished." She breathed the last words very gently, looking at the dead form with hands folded peacefully on the breast that had heaved with so many bitter emotions. "I wish I were with him," she said suddenly. "If Pauline had not come last night, I'm afraid—Yes, it's damnation, I know. That was all kept me from it—I felt I could never see my mother again. And oh! I want to see her, I want to see her!"

She said the last words like a stricken child. Gregory's heart ached.

"We are wasting time," she said, recovering herself, "we must help Pauline, now. Perhaps it is all for the best—it would have been too cruel had she been here, when—" She nodded toward her father. "But she never thinks of self: that has always been Pauline's great trouble—every one

comes before her. And it is useless to dream of such a sacrifice, such a substitution," she went on. "Where can I hide, or how? They would find me in the end, and I should live in continual fear, continual horror, not only for myself, but for all those who knew my whereabouts."

He could not but acknowledge the truth of these words.

"At least," he said, "you shall not be alone in your suffering. Pauline will go with you——"

"No," she said, shuddering: "Pauline has too many enemies; it is not our fault that our life is different——"

"If I can not go where Pauline goes," said Gregory Lackland steadily, "at least I will provide safety and protection for her. And as soon as may be I will follow. You shall have every help that money can provide, and the best lawyers in London. I am no stranger there. I have lived there some years of my life, and I well know how to go about such things."

Her hopeless face lighted up wonderfully.

"You give me courage," she said. "Thank God I have found a friend. One has to be friendless to appreciate what that means."

With some of the money Pauline had given her she had been able, Sunday as it was, to purchase a plain cloak and hat, and these she donned to go out with Gregory. Pauline had told him always that Muriel was pretty, and bright, and gay. There was no trace of brightness or prettiness in the wan, worn, haggard creature who walked slowly beside him to the cars.

"Before we do anything else," said Gregory gently, "let us find an undertaker. Your father must be taken care of properly, and the sooner it is done the better. I suppose you will bury him here—in this country?"

"You and Pauline intend to live here always, do you not?" she asked a little wistfully.

"Yes," he said, "we intend to live here always, God helping us."

"And if God is kind to me I shall be able to live near you," she went on. "We were born here, you know, Pauline and I, though we have been brought up abroad. I would like my father's body to be near us. Maybe, later, we will be able to bring my mother here and bury him with her, so that they can be together."

Gregory smiled sympathetically. He felt more

at ease now that the danger which threatened Pauline was such a patent one—an imaginary one, really, from which she could be released.

They went directly to the police station. As it happened, the very first man Gregory saw was Hayes, and Hayes, he knew, had much influence at headquarters. He drew him aside, and in a low tone explained the whole matter quickly and clearly, so that Hayes could grasp the situation at once.

"I'm going in to the chief now, Mr. Lackland," he said. "Wait here for me until I call you."

Muriel sat trembling beside Gregory on the bench. She did not know what ordeal awaited her. She had gone through so much that she felt she could not endure any more. The agony was not so keen as it had been—that was only natural. Human nature can stand just so much, then the senses become dulled; pain has not the same effect, the same power. Presently, after what seemed like an interminable length of time to Gregory, Hayes appeared. There was a startled look on his face.

"I'm afraid you're in for a shock, Mr. Lackland," he said sympathetically. "Come with me to the chief, please."

Gregory entered the small back room eagerly. His first sensation was one of disappointment. Pauline was not present. He glanced questioningly toward the gray-haired man who sat behind the desk, looking at him keenly now over gold-rimmed glasses.

"Mr. Lackland, I presume?"

"Gregory Lackland, sir," he answered. The officer turned inquiringly toward Muriel.

"My name is Morton," she said. Her high-bred, refined accents accorded ill with the poor, cheap clothes she wore. "Muriel Faulkner Morton. My husband was Cyril Morton, a banker, of London."

He nodded gravely.

"We quarreled—he threatened me with a revolver, and in trying to avoid it there was a struggle. I read that he was dying, and that he claimed his wife shot him. That he is dead now, I presume, since extradition papers were made out for me. Last night—the officers came. My sister Pauline was there. She gave herself up in my place, thinking, perhaps, that I would try to escape, and that the truth would be discovered when it was too late to arrest me. That is all, sir."

"There is evidently no subterfuge in this lady's story," said the chief gravely. "There is a sister, Mr. Lackland?"

"My promised wife, sir."

"So." He drummed on the desk a few moments. "Madam," he said, then, "I am glad to inform you that Cyril Morton has recovered; that while there was some correspondence with Scotland Yard, they found it unnecessary to make out extradition papers, as your husband completely exonerated you from all blame."

The two listened to him in silence. Muriel stared at him with fascinated eyes. Gregory with fallen jaw.

"Then Pauline—Miss Faulkner?" he said, in a thick voice.

"Was not arrested through our agency—has not been arrested at all."

"Not—been—arrested—at—all! Don't tell me she is not here, don't tell me that!"

"She is not here, sir. There is something in this hard to understand. If the young lady had an enemy——"

"An enemy!" echoed Gregory. "Oh, my Pauline, my poor Pauline!"

He seemed like a man suddenly distraught. He swung on Hayes, quickly.

"Hayes! You know! Hayes, she has fallen into that man's clutches! You can help me—you must, you must! I see it all. She has been followed—followed to her father's house, and then they concocted this diabolical plan, meaning to claim her as Muriel, anyhow."

The hoarse cry of a wounded animal was in his tones. Every fiber of his being rose in rage and pain. His hands clenched.

"Do not worry, sir," said Hayes reassuringly. "We'll have her—we'll have her in a very short while!"

But Gregory had sunk down upon a chair, heedless of his words. Despair succeeded impotent rage. He murmured the girl's name over and over again. He had forgotten all else, everything but her imminent peril. He heard nothing after that. He knew Hayes said something about going into the case—what he answered he could not have told. He only knew that he was taken finally to some hotel, that he registered, that he went to his own room. His mother, his home, everything was completely swept from his mind. He could think but one thought, and that thought was fearful torture.

CHAPTER XXII

IN THE TOILS

PAULINE woke to consciousness with a dull throbbing in her temples. At first her mind was a blank. She opened her eyes vaguely once or twice, and shut them again. She was dreaming, she knew, and wished she could awaken. Everything seemed so silent, so quiet—not a sound disturbed the stillness.

She lay with closed eyes, wondering how long the dream would last. Then she thought of Mrs. Lackland—she must get up at once, and go to her. It seemed ages since she had seen her.

This thought roused the girl. She struggled to a sitting posture, holding both hands tightly about her throbbing head. She glanced, first with curious, then with startled, questioning eyes, around her. Where was she? What was this place? This plain, bare room, with its small bed and one chair—was she in prison . . . a prison? Why, they were to take her to prison last night. She remembered now—remembered meeting Muriel and her

father, remembered the officers' coming—remembered going down the stairs with them, and into the carriage.

After that her mind refused to carry her any further. What had happened after she entered the carriage? Yes, one man sat beside her, the other opposite. Neither had spoken a word. Had she fainted? And from a faint drifted off into slumber? For it had been night then, and it was day now—the rays of light coming in at the high window, heavily barred, told her that. Was this indeed a prison cell?

She rose and tottered to the window. It was set high in the wall, so she pulled the chair across the room, and climbed on it. Below her stretched a sweep of marshy ground, with not a house in sight. Far off in the distance she caught a glimpse of water. She gazed, startled, fascinated. This could not be a prison—no prison would be like this.

A vague fear began to torment her now. If it were not a jail, what was it? And how did she get here? Was she to be taken back to England immediately, and was this the place where they kept such prisoners?

She tried the door. It was bolted on the outside,

as she had surmised. There was no keyhole, and the door was of plain, heavy oak, hard as iron, which fitted snugly into the framework, so that no probing from the inside could release whatever lock held it. Pauline examined all her surroundings carefully, curiously. The dull throbbing in her head ceased as she moved around, but her tongue was parched with thirst, and her throat was burning.

She sat down on the side of the bed to think, but thinking was so impossible under the circumstances that she rose again and moved swiftly up and down the floor. By and by the frightful stillness began to prey upon her—it was worse than any noise could have been.

The minutes dragged by like hours. To her mental agitation was added now physical suffering. She had eaten nothing last night—the food would have choked her. She had had no food really since her breakfast the day before, luncheon having been a hurried, early meal in her anxiety to get away. But the terrible thirst was worse than the pangs of hunger. Her tongue seemed swollen to the bursting point. And still she was left there, in the silence and loneliness.

The hours came and went. She thought it must be noontime, because the light grew stronger through the little barred window. She lay on the bed, exhausted, watching, with fascinated eyes, the stream of sunlight narrowing and growing dull. It was late afternoon now she knew, for the light had grown fainter. Soon it would be dark, pitch dark. Must she endure a night as she had done this day? She closed her eyes resignedly at that thought. Perhaps she had been brought here and forgotten. Perhaps she was to die here!

Her hand struck something hard at her waist, and she slipped her fingers inside to find her rosary. The touch of the beads gave her courage. At least she could pray. God and His blessed Mother, who had protected her from so many dangers to soul and body, who had brought her out of the depths of indifference and despair, would heed the petition of the least of their children!

She turned on her side and clasped her hands together—she was too weak to sit up now, and prayed as best she might. If she were to die, she asked that God might be with her. If it were a lingering death of agony, He, too, had suffered

that—and she would accept it in atonement for all her sins.

She drifted off into a troubled, uneasy slumber then, filled with fearful dreams.

* * * * *

The bolt was drawn noiselessly, the door swung outward. It was now almost dark in the room. The newcomer carried an unlighted lamp in one hand, and a pitcher and glass in the other. He put all three on a chair, and then went to the bed, standing looking down at the recumbent figure. Finally, something about her—her attitude, her pallor, alarmed him. He bent over her and touched her hand.

The touch awakened her. Her eyes flared open, staring into his face. He drew back instantly, and she, by a superhuman effort, sat up on the side of the bed, bracing herself for support against the iron framework at the top. The man poured out a glass of water and carried it to her.

“Drink,” he said briefly.

Pauline lifted the glass to her lips with shaking fingers. The water was like the draught from a stream of paradise. The man struck a match and lighted the lamp.

"We must have light to talk by," he said.

Pauline held the glass in her hands and stared at him. She had not been able to talk, but the water revived her. Now the man sat on the foot of the bed and faced her.

"I suppose you are wondering what has brought me here," he began.

"Yes," she said, "I—am—wondering." Her mouth was still parched, so that words came slowly. "I would like to know where I am."

"A hundred miles from nowhere," said the man grimly. "In the middle of a marshy section, four hours' walk from the nearest house. And you are absolutely and completely in my power."

The girl raised her hand to her head in a bewildered fashion.

"I don't understand," she said. "Why should I be in such a place as you describe—and why should you claim that I am in your power, Mr. Stanhope?"

"Because it is true. Because you owe me the pleasure of being installed here."

"And your purpose?"

"I am foolish enough to be very much in love with you."

Pauline shook her head.

"You talk as if this were some savage country," she said. "Do you think I have no friends?"

"Many, I am sure," he said, with sarcasm.

"One, at least, who will not remain long in ignorance of my whereabouts. Who are you—how dare you carry me off in this fashion?"

Julian Stanhope laughed under his breath.

"I am surprised that you ask me such a question. I dare anything—and you, better than any one in all this world, know that."

He turned his eyes upon her meaningly. In spite of her suddenly acquired self-control a shudder went through her frame. Why were those steely blue eyes so menacing, so familiar?

"I better than any one?" she faltered. "My acquaintance with you is a short one, Mr. Stanhope. I do not see how you can make an assertion of that sort."

Julian Stanhope smiled.

"You are better acquainted with me than you imagine, Miss Pauline," he said mockingly. "Watch, if you please."

He ran his fingers through the short, closely curled crop of dark-brown hair that covered his head, and it came away in his hands. With equal

facility, he removed the small, neat Vandyke beard that covered his chin. He rubbed his handkerchief a few moments over his eyebrows—and then with a sinister smile on his now beardless lips he looked once more at the girl, who had risen to her feet, clutching at her bosom with both straining hands, shrinking away from him in fear and horror, shrinking, quivering, until she reached the opposite wall, where she clung.

“Wilfrid Penniston!”

“Yes, Wilfrid Penniston,” he said. “Your devoted servant, your ever-faithful lover.”

A low moan passed her lips.

“O my God, will you fail me now?” she whispered. “Am I never to escape from the fate that threatens me? Am I never to breathe freely on this earth where Thou hast placed me? God help me! Mary, Mother of the friendless, help me!”

The man watched her. The removal of false beard and hair had made a remarkable change, as if with their going the whole expression of his face had altered. His large blue eyes seemed crafty now, where before they had been penetrating; the lips were full and coarse. The smooth, light hair

and light eyebrows served to intensify the sallowness of his complexion, which the darker hue of his disguise had made a distinguished pallor. He had known how to make all his natural disadvantages work to his advantage. Gazing at him, Pauline could only remember the fact that it had been his boast always that he could so change himself that his mother would not recognize him, even under closest scrutiny. He had made good that boast. She herself had seen him many times and under different circumstances; had spoken to him even on matters dear to her, and had suspected nothing. And oh! how much of the events of the past few months this revelation explained!

"Well," he said, at last, a little impatiently, "as soon as you get over your surprise, I want to talk to you."

She drew a deep, long breath. His voice roused every spark of courage in her soul.

"I am not surprised," she said. "I am—frightened at the accuracy of my own instincts."

"You never knew," he said quickly, jealously. "You never knew."

"I knew enough to hate you," she said. "Oh, I am very glad I always knew enough to hate you."

Two spots of light seemed to glow in the steely-blue eyes.

"Be careful," he warned. "Do not tax my patience too far. Do not forget that you are as completely in my power——"

"As I was before—and still I escaped you."

"You are foolish to antagonize me," he said. "If you will listen and be sensible, perhaps we can arrive at an understanding. Won't you sit down?"

"Not unless you stand," she said. "I can see you very distinctly from here."

His face colored. He was silent. In his own mind he knew that this girl's will completely dominated him. Away from her he could plan schemes of vengeance, he could formulate arguments that would compel her to listen to him. But in her presence he was helpless. He had felt this always. He would have done good for her sake as willingly as he chose to do evil. Whatever the bias of his mind, the perversion of his talents, he loved her.

"Pauline," he said in a more gentle tone, "Pauline, I would not harm a hair of your head. You must listen to me now . . . you will at least hear an explanation——"

But she dreaded this milder mood worse than his most terrible threats.

"You are a buffoon!" she mocked, and her voice was harsh. "You are a coward. One weak woman—a poor creature, scarce worth looking at the second time, and Penniston, the powerful, spends his time upon her! Wastes it, when there is so much work waiting for him! Oh, coward, coward, coward!"

He sprang to his feet, with hands clenched.

"Don't tempt me," he said, "don't tempt me. I have killed for less than that."

She flung back her head defiantly.

"You *are* a coward! It is because you know your own cowardice that you are angry. You got my father into your power and compelled him to sell his daughter to a man she hated; you hounded him and betrayed him, and when he retaliated, you followed him and me across the ocean, determined to have your way! Well, you have it! My sister is a broken woman, her beauty is gone, her health impaired, her husband dying at her hands! My father is dying, too—he will never see another year of life. But I!" Her gray eyes blazed at him, her lips taunted him anew, her whole face glowed with

the hatred she felt. "You have never conquered me! You shall never conquer me! Because of your high phrases and specious arguments I believed in you at first, but you could not deceive me long. You have not deceived me, you never will. I may die—I can die. I am not afraid of death, I looked death too long in the face to be afraid of it. But I shall go out of life unconquered! I shall go out of life your enemy—and God will deal between us!"

The words were hurled at him like so many blows. Each one of them struck him with bitterness. He had risen and watched her, fascinated, as she spoke, and then the white anger which she had striven to rouse within him asserted itself. He stooped toward the chair and took the lamp in his hand.

"I am going now," he said. "You have had no food, and you will get none. You shall have no light, and you shall have no companionship but your own thoughts. Let us see how far they can carry you. I will not return again until you are ready to talk to me. When you feel that that time has come, knock on the floor with the chair. I shall hear you and respond. There will be food

waiting—food and drink and comfort—when you are ready for them. But,” and he turned toward the door, “remember this: I will not relent. You can starve if you will. If I can not have you living, Gregory Lackland shall never have you. You shall never marry another man but myself, and in knocking on that floor for assistance you will be prepared to accept the terms I offer you. You understand?”

“I thank you—yes,” she answered.

“That is good.” He went toward the door and with a sweep of his hand overturned the pitcher of water to the floor. “The quicker to make you come to your senses!” he said, with that evil, bitter smile, and then went out and shut the door behind him. It swung noiselessly into place. She heard the bolts being slipped, and his footsteps receding. Then, weak, faint, exhausted, she tottered through the darkness toward the bed, found it, and threw herself upon it.

“Come quickly, death,” she said, in low, faint accents. “Sweet sister, death, come quickly. And God have mercy upon me.”

CHAPTER XXIII

RESCUE!

GREGORY LACKLAND did not go home that day. He reached Dr. Truman by telephone, and heard that his mother's condition was unchanged. The greater peril that Pauline might even then be encountering swallowed up every other thought. He paced his room with a steady stride, thinking, thinking. He had no solution of the problem. He did not know where to turn. There would be no boat until Tuesday, so that Pauline had not been taken out of the country. Hayes had already notified all the steamship companies, and placed men on watch for suspicious persons. This was only a precaution, for Hayes was a thorough man in his chosen profession. He worked from the starting-point.

This starting-point led him to the mean street in which Muriel Morton still lived, watching beside her dead father's body. He lounged carelessly around the door, waiting for the chance comer, that he might discover one who had been

present the previous night and observed the departing carriage. He had not seen Mrs. Morton and was not anxious to see her, as he had already had her description of the two men—a meager one, because of the terrible excitement under which she had been laboring. Now, as he leaned against the door-jamb, fumbling with the somber streamers that proclaimed the presence of death within the house, he thought that he could explain his presence by saying that he was one of the undertaker's assistants if people became too curious.

No one went in or out, however, but he suddenly found himself listening to the most terrible yells, he could faithfully declare, he had ever heard. These yells were accompanied by vigorous whacking, bestowed evidently by no weak hand. A slight smile spread over Hayes' mouth, as the wails and shouts of the boy struck on his ears, and a woman's shrill tones accompanied each substantial blow with force and emphasis. Presently there was a tremendous scuffle, and a door in the back was thrown open. A boy of about twelve years old rushed out, shielding himself with both his arms, and a slipper, flung after him with speed and accuracy, caught him fairly between the shoulders

and pitched him head foremost along the dusky hall. Hayes managed to break the force of the fall, however, and yanked the lad to his feet. The door was slammed hastily when its inmate saw that there was a stranger on the scene.

"Hold on, there!" said Hayes, not unkindly. "Trying to break your neck?"

"You jest lemme go!" howled the boy. "Gwan! Lemme go! She ain't agoin' to beat me no more!"

"I hope not," said Hayes. "You certainly look as if you had had enough beating for this time, at any rate."

"She'll be out in a minute," warned the boy. "And she wouldn't mind beatin' you, either! She's jest lookin' for her shoes!"

"Maybe she won't find them," said Hayes encouragingly. "But let's get on then—I don't want any part of your beating. What did you do?"

"I didn' do nothin'."

"Of course you didn't! It's just about likely you didn't." Hayes went on down the street, however, with his hand on the boy's arm. "Still, I think you're the fellow I want to see," he said. "Here's a handkerchief. Wipe your face. Your forehead is bleeding."

The boy looked at him curiously, suspiciously.

"I bet I know who you are," he said. "You're one of dem fly cops, and you're after de people on de top floor."

Hayes threw back his head and laughed.

"You'll be a 'fly cop' yourself some day, if you keep on making guesses," he said. "No, I'm not after the people on the top floor."

"Who den? Old man Bell?"

"No, I'm not after old man Bell."

The boy was silent a moment.

"I didn' do nothin,' mister," he said then, ingratiatingly. "Cross me heart, I didn' do nothin'."

"Maybe not—but your mother thinks you did something."

"Gee! Could I help it if I got stuck? I only meant to steal a ride a little way, an' de fust thing I knew I was so far out I didn' dast chuck it, or I'd never get back. So I stuck on, till me spine was broke. And when I tried to sneak home, I couldn't hold on no more—only half-way. So I had to hoof it. An' dat's de God's honest truth, mister, so help me jiminy."

As if by an inspiration Hayes saw through this

disconnected statement. He stared reflectively at the boy an instant, his eyes studying him.

"O you unexpected bonanza!" he murmured. "You gold mine! You priceless gem! What luck! What royal luck! I can't believe it!" Aloud he said. "And when you got home your mother gave you a good beating for running away."

"Dat's jest it—'n' I couldn't make her see through it 'at I only did it for fun. I didn' mean nothin'."

"That was the carriage that the strange young lady went off in last night, wasn't it?"

"Yep. Dere was a fat guy an' a t'in one. De t'in guy went in de house and de fat guy came back after dey carried de girl in an' he got into de carriage all alone. What was it, mister? 'Tain't none o' my business, but it looks like kidnappin'."

"Sonny," said Hayes impressively, "what's your name?"

"Bill—Bill Leavitt. Mom calls me Willie, but I ain't no Willie boy. Bill's good enough for me."

"Well, Bill, if you grow up as smart as you are now, you can make something of yourself—yes, and I'll help you. Now, lad, listen. That was a plain case of kidnapping. Those fellows made be-

lieve they were detectives and took the girl out. She thought she was going to a police station, and instead they've carried her off and hidden her."

"De Black Hand!" cried Bill Leavitt, in an awed whisper.

"No—not the Black Hand. Just people that have a grudge against her. I'm telling you this because I want you to help us."

"Sure I will! Help! I should say so! Ikey! Me in line wid a real fly cop! You're de goods? You ain't pullin' it over me?"

"I'm the goods," said Hayes, showing his shield.

"Dat's it! Put it dere, pal!" He held out one grimy hand, and Hayes shook it hastily. "Now what do you want me to do? But, say—you got ten cents?"

"What for?"

"I'm starved. I didn' have nothin' to eat sence last night an' you bet me mother didn' give me porterhouse steak for me supper to-night! I'd like to get a meal 'fore we start to do anything."

"I'm with you," said Hayes. "Do you think you could fetch us to that house again? Do you think you know where it is?"

"I couldn' *tell* you where it is," said Bill con-

fidently. "But I can bring you dere all right. I ain't been brought up wid de gang for nothin'."

While the lad was eating, Hayes telephoned to Gregory Lackland and told him where to meet him. There were a few preliminaries to be arranged. It was too late that night to swear out a warrant, but Hayes waived that aside as of little moment. Then they had to get four men to accompany them. Gregory Lackland and four detectives occupied the interior of the coach, while Bill sat up beside Hayes, who drove. It was pitch-dark and quite cold. A piercing March wind was blowing that seemed to penetrate into the very marrow of the thinly clad boy. But it did not abate his courage. Hayes wrapped him up as well as he could in the thick fur robe.

"It was morning when dey got to it," said the boy. "It wasn't light, but I heard de fellow say it was four o'clock. It's a fierce drive, mister."

"That's what we're here for, boy," said Hayes. "And we don't want to get too close. We could probably get there more quickly by train, but you have no idea where it is located."

"Only by me nose," said the boy sagaciously, "an' what I could make out . . . we turned here,

mister," he said sharply, as they reached the corner of the avenue, "and went straight uptown, till we got near de station. Den we cut across again as far as we could go—to the Drive—right over de bridge and straight ahead."

It was, indeed, "a fierce drive, mister." Once they came to a cross-road at which the boy hesitated a second. But he suddenly remembered that just here one of the men had called out from the carriage. "To the left—past the big tree," and this settled the question. They were driving through a sparsely settled section of the city now. At the noise of the carriage-wheels sleeping dogs were roused, and Bill enlivened the tedium of the hours by tormenting them as far as he was able from the top of a coach. But soon even these stray farmhouses were left behind. It was a wild drive, an uncertain drive, with uncertainty at the end of it.

Suddenly the boy put his hand on the detective's arm.

"Smell dat?" he said. "We're coming to it. Dat's de sea—it's close to de water."

Hayes drew rein at once. The horses, strong as they were, settled back willingly enough. The pace had been a steady one and they were tired.

“How far ahead, Bill?” he asked anxiously.

“I don’t know, sir—I ain’t any idea now. It’s on the left-hand side. It’s a square brick building, ’bout t’ree stories high. I jest could see it a little bit—it was so pitchy dark. Dere was a roof over de door, like—a pointed roof, sticking out from de front of de house. And dere ain’t another house nowhere round.”

Once more the detective chuckled. He was lost in admiration at this boy’s unexpected resource and keen observation.

“If we failed to find it after that we ought to be shot,” he remarked. The others had jumped out of the coach when it stopped, and now stood waiting for Hayes and the boy. Gregory Lackland, whose eyes were burning and smarting in his head from lack of rest and sleep, had not spoken a single word since they started. He was simply an automaton, pursuing an elusive hope. Pauline, the girl he loved so dearly and so tenderly, was in the hands of a fiend. Only the swiftness with which they had been able to raise this clue gave him any courage to pursue it. He took his place among them now, listening as they devised ways and means to accomplish their purpose. They blank-

eted the horses well, and tied them securely. They did not know how many men would be needed at the end of their journey, so they felt that not one could be left behind. Hayes and the boy led, the rest following.

And this was the hardest ordeal of all. The ground was damp and moist—there had been very heavy rains, and the thick mud of the road soon covered shoes and clothing with a clinging black paste. There was not a single word spoken. The boy was drawn up close to Hayes, and Hayes had thrown his arm about him to help him along, for even his sturdy pluck could not beat back the exhaustion that was stealing over him. Presently Hayes had to call one of the men, and between them they formed a sort of strap or seat of one of the carriage blankets which they had brought with them, and made the boy sit in it. In this way they managed to carry him, taking turns when the roads were very heavy.

Presently the lad, nodding sleepily, straightened into alertness.

“We’re pretty near it now,” he said. “Hear de water? Before you could only smell it. . . . Say, mister, put me down. Dat’s de house. Dere

it is. Put me down, mister. I'm all right now."

They put him down. In the darkness the square house loomed before them without a distinguishing characteristic. But a great sense of satisfaction filled them. At last, after the long uncertainty of the past hours, they had succeeded.

Gregory Lackland roused as from a stupor.

"This is the house?" he asked. "He says this is the house, Hayes?"

"Yes. Be careful, Mr. Lackland. The less said the better. We have no idea how many there are to face. Have you a revolver?"

"No," said Gregory, in a rough voice. "But if—if it's that man—I won't need a revolver. My two hands will be enough."

Hayes compressed his lips. There would be more than a rescue on their hands if Gregory Lackland came face to face with Penniston.

With every appearance of strength and solidity, the door yielded easily to Hayes' skeleton key. There was a chain on the inside which had not been slipped into its socket, and also a bolt. The bolt had evidently been pushed over very carelessly, so that it failed to catch. The men had removed their

shoes on the doorstep, and now Hayes barely breathed his instructions.

"I'll take the boy behind me—we must protect him. You two men follow—then Mr. Lackland and the other two. This door either shows extreme confidence or it is part of a trap. Have your revolvers ready."

Like ghosts they went silently up the stairs. There was not the faintest glimmer of light. Hayes felt each step with his hand carefully as he went. The stale, musty odor of an unused, un-
aired building was everywhere. They scarcely breathed. Slipping his hands along the wall, Hayes knew he was on the first landing. He turned up the next flight. Here a door was slightly ajar, and light came from the room beyond it. It took but a moment for Hayes to ascertain that it held an occupant. And as they stood, waiting, a voice reached them, rising and falling steadily. First, it was a moaning sound, then a low laugh, then the babbling, incoherent tone of delirium. Gregory Lackland straightened up suddenly, but the man behind him was too quick—Hayes had known he could depend on him. He put his hand over Gregory's mouth, muttering warnings into his ear.

Hayes moved into the room with a catlike tread. The man who occupied it was seated at a table in the center of the room, his head upon his arms. He had fallen asleep.

Gregory's tones roused him. He had torn himself from the cautioning hold of the detective.

"Man, man! It's Pauline!" he said. "Do you not think I recognize her voice? It is Pauline!" And then there was the sound of flying footsteps. He had plunged madly up the second flight of stairs.

Penniston, rousing from his slumber, looked into the barrel of a revolver. Hayes stood over him. One glance into his face and the man recognized him.

"So we are fated to meet again, my friend?" he said. "The cards are with you. But I guess you're a little bit too late—just a little bit too late."

The groan of a man in agony floated down to them—followed by despairing words. Penniston laughed again.

"Checkmate!" he said softly, under his breath. "We are quits at last, good friend Lackland. No man has ever conquered me without paying well for his victory."

CHAPTER XXIV

AND LAST

It was Gregory's arms that went around the slight form lying on the pillow, her rosary clenched tightly in her hands, her lips cracked and swollen, the tongue protruding. It was Gregory's voice that fell upon her ears—deaf ears now. One of the men, who was striking matches steadily in the room, spoke.

"Let's get her out of here," he said. "That's either poison—or she's dying of thirst. Go down and see if you can find some water, Tom," he remarked. "You go with him, Billy Leavitt. You'll find it if it is in the house."

Gregory lifted the girl in his arms and they went down to where Penniston and Hayes still sat. As he came in, the prisoner opened his mouth to speak evidently to taunt, but a sharp rap of Hayes' revolver on his knuckles silenced him.

"Get him out of here, will you, Hayes?" said Gregory pleadingly, but his tones were dangerous. "Tie him up and give him to some one of your men

and come and help me. You will know what to do better than any one."

Tom and the boy came with the water then. They bathed the unconscious girl's face and hands, and sprinkled a few drops on her swollen tongue. As it touched her face the low moaning ceased. The strained and terrible expression of her countenance seemed to melt into one more peaceful.

"At least she is not dead," said Gregory; "we can be thankful for that."

Hayes had her hand in his.

"I don't know much about medicine," he said, "but she hasn't been long enough without food and water to reach this stage. She's only been away thirty-six hours, and she's in a raging fever. Probably her brain's given out under the strain. We'll have to get her to a doctor as quickly as we can, for she's frightfully ill, Mr. Lackland. With that fever she'd be gone in a few hours. Let us keep bathing her face and hands this way—it's the best we men can do for her, and I'll send a couple of the fellows after the carriage. Then there's nothing to be done but to get her into it and back to civilization as quickly as possible."

Two of the men had anticipated orders and had

already started back. It was a half-hour before the carriage drew up in front of the door. Three men were left on guard with Penniston, and Hayes promised to send them a conveyance as soon as he struck a farmhouse. Gregory and he lifted the unconscious Pauline into the carriage with one of the detectives, and Hayes and the boy crawled back on the box. Bill Leavitt, the god of the machine, had been a silent, ecstatic spectator of all that had transpired. None of the fellows would ever have a tale to beat this one! This was an adventure that would establish his reputation for ever!

And with a blissful smile on his thin little mouth he fell fast asleep, and Hayes gathered him up close to him, covered him well, and bothered him no more. His work was done, well done.

The ride to the city didn't seem half as long as the ride out of it had been. From time to time Gregory cooled the girl's face with water, and gave her a little to drink. She seemed to be breathing more naturally, but Gregory could not forget that first expression. It had been of such intense agony that he felt he would never, dead or living, banish that terrible glimpse of her.

They reached the city limits at eight o'clock. Hayes woke Bill Leavitt and dispatched a man with him to make explanation of his second disappearance to his mother, and also to relieve the distress which Pauline's sister must be enduring. Then he drove to the nearest hospital. Pauline was carried in, the situation hastily explained, and in a few minutes a number of trained nurses were working over her.

"None too soon," said the doctor, "but we've got a fighting chance, and we'll make the best of it."

It was night before Gregory Lackland knew that the fighting chance had won. He was permitted to see her before he left the hospital. She did not know him, and he thought that they must be mistaken. He had never seen any one look so ill. The fever flush had left her cheeks, and the whole face was so drawn and pitiful that he turned away with a shudder.

"On your honor," he whispered, to the nurse nearest him, "on your honor you think she will get better?"

"We have every hope," she answered gently. "This morning there was none. But she has a fine

constitution. We have made a beginning, at any rate."

And with this he had to be content.

* * * * *

When he reached his hotel, spent and weary, Hayes was waiting for him with a rueful countenance.

"I've got bad news," he said. "Our man tried to get away—slipped off as they were putting him in the wagon to take him back to town——"

"Escaped!" cried Gregory.

"Escaped human justice, at any rate," was the answer. "Pierson shot him. Just meant to maim him, but he ducked, and the bullet caught him plumb in the back of the head."

Gregory was silent for a moment. Then he raised his haggard, tired eyes to Hayes' face.

"I hope God won't hold it against me, if I look upon his taking off as a blessing," he said. "I thank Him that He has found His own way to deal with a man who has brought trouble and suffering in his train wherever he went. I think Pierson's bullet was an act of divine providence."

"One can't blame you for thinking so, Mr. Lack-

land," said Hayes. "He's out of the way forever now—he can't do any one any more harm."

"And again thanks be to God!" said Gregory. "Will you join me at supper? I have time to be hungry now that they give me hopes of Miss Faulkner. And I want to decide what is to be done for that brave little lad to whom we owe so much. I feel as if nothing I can do, ever, will repay him."

"I'll take care of him, Mr. Lackland," said Hayes. "I think there's something to that lad. And I guess he's pretty poor."

"All the better," said Gregory briefly. "I'll attend to that part."

* * * * *

It was a month before Pauline, convalescent, was moved, by easy stages, to Lyndhurst. Mrs. Lackland, confined to her bed altogether, still lingered, however, seeming, as it were, to crave Pauline's presence. After the girl's coming she slowly declined again, until the end, going out of life so peacefully and gently that they could scarcely deem it death. Pale and thin, the shadow of herself, Pauline's courage was unfailing. She sat beside the woman whom she had loved so truly and held her hand in hers until the last fluttering

breath had left her lips, and when Gregory threw himself on his knees in an outburst of natural grief, her other hand sought him with comforting, gentle touch. They had expected it so long, and the end was so easy and so painless, as of one going quietly, on a pleasant journey, into another and more joyous land.

Of what had happened—of the agony she had endured during that fearful night, Pauline could not bring herself to speak, nor would Gregory permit her mind to dwell on it. Muriel was living with them at Lyndhurst, and in the quiet serenity of the life, after the storm and stress of the preceding years, she was slowly regaining some of her old prettiness. She had not heard from her husband; there had evidently been little love lost on either side. She had married him because compelled to; he, because it would further whatever purpose he had in view. She did not expect to hear from him, she told Pauline, and would be glad to be let alone, to work out her salvation in her own way.

Whatever Marion Sigogne had hoped to accomplish by her alliance with Julian Stanhope, was nullified by his complete disappearance. Of the

actual truth she suspected nothing, and in the first dazed stage of her recovery Pauline often asked herself if she had not dreamed that part of her adventure. Later on, as the mists cleared from her puzzled brain, she saw everything distinctly. She never knew how Julian Stanhope—Wilfrid Penniston, rather—traced her on that night, nor when or how he had laid his plans.

She had not told Gregory—she could tell no one. At least not until she could look back without a shudder. But on the night before their wedding, seated on the broad terrace, the moonlight enfolding them in the tender benediction of its pure white glow, she related all—in little, halting sentences, with long pauses in between. From the room beyond came Bertram's deep tones and Helen's charming ones. They were chatting merrily. They had known neither storm nor stress, their hearts had not yet been tried, and in this they were altogether removed from the atmosphere surrounding these two.

"The one horror that I remember best is the terrible fear that some power greater than my will would compel me to summon him. It was not so much the craving for food and water—it was the

agony of the thought that he would come again. Once I imagined he came up and stood in the doorway looking at me. Perhaps he did—I don't know. But I screamed out my hatred of him—and I knew that while I could make him feel my hatred and contempt, he could never conquer me."

She hid her face on Gregory's shoulder, trembling and shaken, and he smoothed her hair with gentle fingers. The past few months had engraven deep lines about his mouth and between his brows, and there were a few white hairs showing at his temples. But the brown eyes were serene and confident. He was sure of himself. He had conquered all his difficulties, and the morrow would see him wedded to the one woman of his heart and life—the woman who had been tested and proven true, and whose gentle and loving spirit would fill his days to completeness. He asked no more, but thanked God for His great blessings—the crowning blessing that He had bestowed in leaving her to him. The stranger had reached her journey's end—the haven of a good man's heart.



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